

BETHEL SEMINARY LIBRARY

REG

224.2 L84

Longacre, Li

A Prophet of the spirit; a



3 0513 0003 8073 9

# A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

HENDRAY B. LONGACRE





12/31/89

75

Antoni Pearson



# A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

A Sketch of the Character and  
Work of Jeremiah

REVISED AND ENLARGED

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

Professor of Old Testament Literature and Religion,  
Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado



THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN  
NEW YORK CINCINNATI



Copyright, 1917, 1922, by  
LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

*The Library*  
BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ST. PAUL MINNESOTA

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition Printed July, 1917  
Reprinted January, 1922

S27416

224.2  
-84

**TO MY WIFE**





## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE .....	7
PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION .....	9
I. BEFORE READING HIS BOOK .....	11
II. THE MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW .....	29
III. THE PERFECT PATRIOT .....	46
IV. A NATIONAL REVIVAL .....	66
V. CONFESSIONS .....	88
VI. THE COVENANT THAT FAILED .....	112
VII. THE NEW COVENANT .....	127
VIII. JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION .....	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES .....	171
INDEX OF SUBJECTS .....	173



## PREFACE

WHEN a Sargent puts all the prophets into one picture, he reproduces the feeling of many a reader of the Bible that the prophets were closely associated. In the Bible the books stand together as in the picture the men stand together; and it is easily supposed that the lives were lived and the books produced in one brief period. Where the Scripture is concerned distinctions of time and circumstance are sometimes felt to be irrelevant, if not irreverent. Within the sacred precincts of the Bible time becomes eternity, men are merged in messages, and the places of earth are lost in the spaces of heaven.

The following brief study of the prophet Jeremiah has been made in the belief that attention to these distinctions leads to a discovery of God's methods of self-revelation, and that such discovery immeasurably deepens and strengthens the spiritual appeal of the Bible and the spiritual values of life.





## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE present edition has been enlarged in order to be of assistance to those desiring to make a fuller acquaintance with the book of Jeremiah than the first edition contemplated. For this purpose (1) a chapter has been added on the teachings of Jeremiah; (2) notes have been appended to each chapter, questions have been added designed to stimulate closer attention to certain aspects of the subject, and a topic for written treatment has been offered; (3) references have been made to the commentary on Jeremiah in the Cambridge Bible series, which the student is expected to use as a basis for the work here suggested. The abbreviation *C.B.* refers to this volume.

Servant of God, well done; well hast thou fought  
The better fight, who single hast maintained  
Against revolted multitudes the Cause  
Of Truth, in word mightier than they in Armes.  
—*Milton.*

And the vision of the dream was this: He saw Onias, him that was high priest, . . . with outstretched hands invoking blessings on the whole body of the Jews: thereupon he saw a man appear, of venerable age and exceeding glory, and wonderful and most majestic was the dignity around him: and Onias answered and said, This is the lover of the brethren, he who prayeth much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah the prophet of God.—*2 Macc. 14*<sup>12-14</sup>.



## CHAPTER I

### BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

THREE PRELIMINARY DISTINCTIONS—THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK—"THUS SAITH THE LORD"—BARUCH AS A REPORTER—TWO LITERARY ELEMENTS IN THE BOOK.

To many readers it is almost a matter of indifference, when Jeremiah or any other prophet is mentioned, whether the reference is to the man, or to the book which bears his name. The Bible is so taken for granted that the distinction between man and book has been all but lost. To emphasize this distinction may incur a charge of novelty. And yet this is only the beginning of that process of discrimination by which any great personality is disengaged from tradition, until he stands clearly and sharply defined against the background of history.

Still further distinctions are to be recognized in the career of the prophet himself. He lived before he wrote. He was a prophet

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

first, and an author afterward. The life preceded the literature, and the literature simply reflected and reported the preceding life and experience. It was only because the life and experience compelled the attention and the allegiance of some of the prophet's contemporaries that the conditions were met which led to the production of a written record. The very existence of the book is thus seen to be a testimony to the prophet's original greatness. In other words, while it is true in a certain sense that Jeremiah derives his greatness from his place in the Bible, it is equally true that the Bible is great because it contains the records of such men as Jeremiah.

Because of its vital bearing on the use and understanding of the Bible as a whole, it is worth while to take at least one more step. In addition to the distinctions between the man and his book, and between what he wrought and what he wrote, there must be recognized the time and process intervening between the completion of any single book and its later inclusion in the sacred collec-

## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

tion of books constituting the Bible. It is clear that the Bible could not be completed until its several books were written. It is equally clear that the books were not written at the same time. So that the formation of the Bible as it now exists involved a process of some complexity, and a period of time long enough to complete the process. Fascinating, and in many respects surprising as the story is, it is too long for narration here.<sup>1</sup> In the study of any other literature the importance of this subject is recognized as a matter of course. Only in the case of the Bible, the most precious literature of all, are such matters apt to be ignored.

In containing an elaborate account of the circumstances under which it was produced, the book of Jeremiah is unique among the books of the Bible. The literary conventions of the Western world did not obtain among the Hebrews of Palestine twenty-five hundred years ago; and books as such were treated with a freedom which to-day

---

<sup>1</sup> Smyth, *The Bible in the Making*, outlines the story briefly yet fully.



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

could not be regarded with indifference. Not only was it permissible to correct or to expand a writing, if the owner of the copy so desired, but such alterations were often regarded as desirable improvements, much as to-day the annotations made by some eminent possessor greatly increase the value of an otherwise ordinary copy of some book. Circumstances of origin and authorship were quite subordinate matters, and such an elaborate narrative as the one in chapter 36 is both rare and precious. While it is hardly probable that it was written solely for the purpose of giving literary information, it is just this information that constitutes much of its present value.

The opening words of this chapter reflect at once the world of Hebrew religious thought—the Bible world—and justify another brief excursion into the general field of biblical interpretation. The immediate impulse to write is described as, “the word of the LORD.” This expression, along with the kindred, “thus saith the LORD,” may be regarded in a fashion that makes these

## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

phrases artificial and mechanical. In Hebrew as in English there are certain phrases in which the words, to a certain extent, have lost their individual values. These phrases are idiomatic expressions, and must be understood as wholes, rather than as literal statements whose meanings can be discovered from grammatic structure and from the definitions of the separate words. It is to this class of expressions that these phrases belong. They do not teach that God needs to use language in order to communicate with men, nor that any particular words in any language represent the divine *ipsissima verba*. A divine revelation to one who spoke some other language than Hebrew would necessarily be uttered in that other language; and the introductory phrase idiomatic in that other language would then be employed. These phrases do no more than assert the speaker's or writer's convictions that the statements thus introduced express God's thoughts and represent the divine will. In other words, these phrases introduce ideas rather than particular words;

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

and the will of God, as contained in the passages which they introduce, is the divine will *as apprehended by the speaker or writer.*

In the Bible no such effacement of personality is involved as would reduce the speaker or writer to a mechanical mouthpiece or a recording automaton. For such a one as Paul, "the word" was the wonderful message about Jesus, told simply according to the ability of the speaker (1 Thess. 2<sub>13</sub>, compare Acts 8<sub>4</sub>). In harmony with this would be the similar expressions which regard Truth as the divine law or word, as in Psa. 119<sub>142</sub> and John 17<sub>17</sub>. These familiar phrases, then, which refer to God as "saying" or "speaking," are simply the natural Hebrew way in which the Hebrew prophets, saints, apostles, prefaced their statement of the will of God as it had been revealed to them, without any thought of imposing limitations upon future revelations of different intent or wider scope. They were so sure and strong in their faith, so selfless in their earnestness, that in uttering the conviction of their hearts they leaped at once to its Source and said,



## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

“Thus saith the LORD.” The modern, abstract way is to say, “I believe the will of God to be—,” or, “It is God’s will that—”; but the difference is only one of language, not one of thought.

In this light the opening words of chapter 36 are seen to embody an experience both real and intelligible. When the conviction came to Jeremiah that there was a divine purpose to be served by setting down in writing the teachings hitherto delivered orally, he said, as any Hebrew would have said, “The word of the LORD<sup>1</sup> came saying, Write.” In response to this conviction, and this is only a further illustration of the free use of the idiomatic phrase, Jeremiah him-

---

<sup>1</sup> The word printed “LORD” (each letter a capital) in the King James Version, and the word “Jehovah” in the American Standard Revision both stand for the word used by the Hebrews of their national Deity, the God of Israel. They are to be distinguished from the words “God” and “Lord.” The Hebrew word “God” is the general term for Deity, whether of Israel or of another nation. The Hebrew word “Lord” has the same freedom of application as the English word, being used for one of superior rank whether master, noble, or Deity. A fine illustration of the need for discrimination in the use of these words may be found in 1 Kings 18:20-40.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

self writes nothing; it is Baruch who does the actual writing. In harmony with this, the dominant character of the book is that of Baruch's reminiscences of Jeremiah. While this is not to be taken in a Boswellian sense, it is highly probable that many of the sayings of Jeremiah that are here preserved were never intended "for publication," but were spoken directly to Baruch in the freedom of intimate intercourse, being set down by him as worthy of record—and they were. This would be especially true of the numerous passages which report Jeremiah's inner, personal, and spiritual experiences.

From Jer. 25<sub>3</sub> (cf. 1<sub>2</sub> and 36<sub>1</sub>) it appears that Jeremiah had been in prophetic work for twenty-two years before the book was written. That he had written down anything before this time is possible, but cannot be asserted positively. If he had preached with any diligence during this period he must have said much more than is contained in this book. The probability is that the discourses included here represent his characteristic and representative ideas.

## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

In any case, however, he was primarily a speaker rather than a writer; and this is true, with but few exceptions, of the prophets generally. And they were not only speakers rather than writers, but they spoke with a freedom that laid no stress on etymological niceties. For them language was but a means to an end, never an end in itself. They uttered their messages in any way that seemed to promise effectiveness. They were concerned with the awakening and amending of the lives of their contemporaries; and any means that would perfect this was welcomed and exercised. Jesus shows the same freedom in the use of language. His disregard of verbal identities is obvious in the differences between the versions of the Beatitudes and of the Lord's Prayer as given by Matthew and by Luke. For his purpose words alone were inadequate; life alone had terms in which it could be expressed.

The prophetic forerunners of Jesus were primarily concerned to impress upon their hearers those high conceptions of God's character, and of man's resultant duty, that

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

have ever been characteristic of the prophetic line. Indeed, if one were to attempt to epitomize the supreme work of the prophets, it might be stated as the development of the idea of God, for it was almost exclusively through their teachings that these conceptions were gradually advanced and ennobled, were slowly spiritualized and universalized, so that men outgrew their early, crude notions of the Divine Being, and moved on to the place where they could receive the exalted revelation which came through Jesus. In this way more than in any other did the prophets prepare the way for him, and for the Christian thought of God as Father.

The presence of enduring elements in the prophetic teachings does not mean that these teachings were given in abstract form. There are no parts of the Bible so immediately practical for the times when they were given, nor so dependent upon their times and circumstances for their interpretation, as the books of the prophets. The book of Jeremiah is no exception. Not only were Jere-



## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

miah's discourses designed for definite situations, but in their application to these Jeremiah differed widely from his predecessor Isaiah, as well as from his follower Ezekiel. It is now seen that one of the characteristics of the prophets is this very immediacy of their work. They labored to awaken, to inspire, and to direct their own generation by applying to the present concrete situation their new and advanced conceptions of righteousness and of the will of God; and it is idle to suppose that their significance can be appreciated or their message understood unless they are seen against the background, and in the light of, the conditions in which they appeared and to which they were designed to apply. While at first it may seem that to connect a prophet so closely with his own age may limit his scope and lower his position, this result is only apparent, not real. Experience shows that when approached from this direction, the prophets are not only more deeply impressive but spiritually more significant than when these circumstances are ignored.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

So far the book has been referred to as though it were all written, just as it now stands, on the occasion described in chapter 36; but such a conclusion would be premature. The chapter distinctly says, in the first place, that Jeremiah's purpose was to write out what he had been teaching during those preceding years, not to tell the story of his life; whereas the book as it now stands contains much purely narrative material, such as this very chapter, wherein no discourses of Jeremiah appear, but only an account of how the book (roll) came to be written. The idea that the whole book was written continuously, as a unit, is further contradicted by the statement at the close of the chapter that to the second roll (the one that survived) "were added many like words." As nothing is said as to whether the additions were prefixed, distributed through the book, or added at the end, this very chapter may be one of the additions. At any rate, this chapter is just the sort of thing Baruch himself might have written on his own account, in order to preserve the

## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

story of what must have been a highly exciting incident, and which, moreover, might have turned out very seriously for both Jeremiah and Baruch.

All this leads to the conclusion that the present book of Jeremiah is not the homogeneous product of a single occasion, but a collection of writings gathered up from time to time and attached, either by the writers themselves or by collectors, to an original and smaller body of discourses, or "words," of Jeremiah. In the present arrangement of fifty-two chapters, the first twenty-five consist mainly, though not exclusively, of discourses of Jeremiah, while the second part of the book consists mainly, though not exclusively, of narrative material describing, as Baruch might have described them, many events connected with Jeremiah and his work.

The lack of chronological order in the book may be illustrated by chapters 21, 25 and 26, where the first verse in each case gives a date for its chapter; but the dates given are in the inverse order of the chap-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

ters. Another indication of the somewhat random character of the book is the occurrence of repeated passages such as, 6<sub>13,15</sub>, which is almost identical with 8<sub>10,12</sub>; or 16<sub>14,15</sub>, which is the same as 23<sub>7,8</sub>. Numerous similar repetitions may be discovered by any attentive reader.

The book, then, may best be described as the memoirs, an early form of biography, of this noble prophet. Just how or when various parts were finally brought together cannot be settled with certainty; but the chief value of the book does not depend upon an answer to this question. However the material may have been collected, it portrays the splendid figure of Jeremiah with remarkable richness of color and detail. Not only are the outward events of his life described, but "we are taken behind the veil and see revelation at work; we know the inmost thoughts and feelings of a strangely attractive character."

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

One of the difficulties that attend the study of the book of Jeremiah arises out of the order (or,



## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

rather, disorder) of its contents. The first step toward surmounting this difficulty is to recognize it. The logical starting place is chapter 36. While this chapter gives no help toward determining the exact content of the various editions through which the biblical book of Jeremiah passed before reaching its present form, its statements about the rewriting, and about the later editions allay any surprise that one might otherwise feel at the rather curious placing of many of the passages in the book. Consult *C.B.*, p. xlff., on the stages through which the book has passed, and also the introduction to chap. 36, on p. 220.

Read carefully Jer. 2 and 3, for an illustration of the sort of thing that frequently occurs. Notice the two sections, 2<sub>14-17</sub>, and 3<sub>6-18</sub>. (1) Each is complete in itself. (2) Neither shows any special connection with what precedes or follows it. (3) When the adjoining passages are read continuously, 2<sub>13</sub> connects perfectly with 2<sub>18</sub>; and 3<sub>5</sub> equally well with 3<sub>19</sub>. Notice also that in 3<sub>6-18</sub> Israel and Judah are set in contrast with each other, whereas throughout the rest of chaps. 2 and 3, the term *Israel* is used of all the people, without distinction of northern or southern kingdoms. These passages are obviously out of order.

Another difficulty grows out of the question whether all that now appears in the book of Jere-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

miah comes from Jeremiah himself. (1) A comparison of Jer. 52 and 2 Kings 24<sub>18</sub> to 25<sub>30</sub>, shows that the book of Jeremiah contains at least one passage that does not come from the prophet himself. (2) It has already been noted that a great deal of the book is *about* Jeremiah (for example, chaps. 26 to 28), as Baruch probably wrote it. (3) There remains the possibility that passages from other sources than Jeremiah, Baruch, or the books of Kings have found their way into the book, as, for example, 10<sub>1,16</sub>. Consult *C.B.*, p. 69, on this passage.

The Greek version of Jeremiah (the Septuagint) has an important bearing on this question (cf. *C.B.*, pp. xlvff.), and the relation of this version to the original form of the book of Jeremiah must necessarily be discussed in any exhaustive study. But the subject is beset with technicalities and can best be left to students prepared to cope with the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Such students (for whom this book is not designed), in the absence of any commanding English commentary, will be able to consult the great European commentaries which, unfortunately, still await translation.

In view of these facts, it is not surprising that the different parts of the book cannot all be set out in chronological order. The occasional notes of time in the book (for example, 21<sub>1</sub>; 25<sub>1</sub>; 26<sub>1</sub>;

## BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

36<sub>1</sub>) are helpful as far as they go, but they are too few to be of much service. Decisions regarding date, order, and even authorship, must be made on the student's best judgment, after he has taken into account the literary character of the passage, its religious, political, or personal content, and its relation to the known history.

For this purpose the most conspicuous historical landmarks are: the Scythian peril, B. C. 625; the great reform, 621; the battle of Carchemish, 605; the first captivity, 597; and the second captivity, 586. (Cf. Chronological Table, *C.B.*, p. liii.) The way the different parts of the book relate themselves to these outstanding events supplies a basis for the outline in *C.B.*, p. xlv. While there is no outline that commands universal assent, this one represents the position of some of the best scholars.

Consult as many different outlines of Jeremiah as possible, beginning with *C.B.*, p. xxxix. They are to be found in special works on Jeremiah, in commentaries, introductions to the Old Testament, and Bible dictionaries. Note the extent to which they agree. At places where they differ, read the parts of Jeremiah in question, decide on the outline which seems most adequate, and write it out in full. Give a list of the outlines consulted, and state the reasons for decision where differences appeared.





## CHAPTER II<sup>1</sup>

### THE MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

BIRTHPLACE—HOME INFLUENCES—LESSONS IN HISTORY—LESSONS IN LIFE—SYMPATHY—THOUGHTFULNESS—COURAGE.

THE study of a prophet is apt to begin too far from the beginning. He appears in the Bible as one of the sacred authors; his work and authority have been accredited and vindicated; his religious position is firmly established; he has unquestionable historical importance; in brief, he is a prophet; he has arrived. When he is thus approached from the conviction of his assured greatness, it is easy to ignore the experience which preceded his ultimate victory, to regard him as one aloof from the discouragements and perplexities that harass the souls of laymen, to see in him a perfection without a process.

Where mankind is concerned this is not

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter appeared in the *Biblical World*, November, 1916, and is reprinted here by permission.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

the divine order. The prophet was a man before he was a prophet, and any study that does not make due allowance for this hangs in the air, loses its touch with life, and becomes unreal and unconvincing. The search for the secret and significance of a prophet's character and work must begin as nearly as possible where he began. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." Before any character can be understood it is necessary to learn what conditions surround his birth and training, what his personal characteristics were, and what influences were operative in the years of his maturity. It may not be possible to discover these in any fullness. If not, the estimate of the man and his work must be to that extent tentative. Even then, however, if the man in question has left behind him a history of undoubted importance, the difficulty of securing adequate information regarding his early life is no release from the obligation, nor from the desirability, of doing the best that is possible with the materials that are available.

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

It is interesting to note that, in the case of Jesus, one of the evangelists (Luke) seems to have felt the importance of filling in as far as possible the story of the so-called "silent years" that preceded Jesus's public ministry. Even at the comparatively early date when Luke wrote, no material seems to have been available, so that he has to content himself with the meager statement that Jesus "went down along with them (his parents) to Nazareth, and did as they told him"; and that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2<sup>51, 52</sup>). The latter statement is simply quoted from the story of the child Samuel (1 Sam. 2<sup>26</sup>).

In the case of Jeremiah, while there is little that deals directly with his early years, his book is rich in biographic material which indirectly supplies outlines that can be filled in without serious error. No other prophet had a biographer of such devotion and assiduity as Baruch; and while the present order, or disorder, of the book leaves much to be desired, it contains such a wealth of personal

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

touches that the figure of Jeremiah stands out far more clearly than that of any other Old Testament prophet.

Jeremiah's home, Anathoth, a small town not far from Jerusalem, had been a residence of priests since the days of David. When Solomon came to the throne it was to Anathoth that he banished Abiathar, the priest who had opposed Solomon's accession (1 Kings 2<sup>26</sup>, 27). It has been suggested, and it is not impossible, that this Abiathar, who was a descendant of Eli, was an ancestor of Jeremiah. This would carry Jeremiah's family back to the days of the Judges. But the fact that he was of priestly descent does not necessarily connect him with these famous priests of early times, interesting as that connection would be. All that can be asserted is that the little Jeremiah grew up in a town where dwelt priestly families of ancient and distinguished traditions.

There can be no question that as the boy grew up he learned and treasured the stories of the great men of old. Not the least famous of these national heroes was, of course,



## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

Saul, the great first king of Israel, who had come from the tribe within whose bounds the little town of Anathoth was situated. Naturally, the stories the youthful Jeremiah heard were not told as scientific history, but, rather, as precious traditions that reflected the interests and aspirations of those who told them. In those days, and for many years afterward, no distinction was drawn between politics and religion, so that all history was religious history; and there can be no doubt that priests, who were the special custodians of the religious teaching, would not only preserve the traditions of the past, but would incorporate with those traditions their own interpretations and ideals.

The devastation of the northern kingdom a century before the time of Jeremiah stood out as a dark and desperate conclusion to a period of lessening loyalty to Jehovah, a period whose colors were all the darker in contrast to the tradition of Jeremiah's day, that Israel, in the still more ancient time of her sojourn in the wilderness, had been as a happy, faithful bride whom Jehovah wooed

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

and won. The tendency was as marked then as now to glorify the distant past—the more distant, the more glorious.

The traditions above referred to are to be thought of as mainly oral. It is impossible to discover what writings, if any, may have been at hand for Jeremiah to consult. Of the writings extant in his day some were later incorporated in the Bible books, while many others, and perhaps the larger part of them, have disappeared. It is doubtful whether Jeremiah, either in his youth or in his maturity, regarded any of these writings as having that sacred character which is to-day associated with the Bible. At that time the movement had barely begun which tended to regard any writing as having sanctity in itself. God was still recognized as a living God, speaking through the living voice of his prophets, rather than as a God who had enshrined his will once for all in a fixed and changeless book.

Jeremiah, however, had more to do than to listen to the stories of the past. Life called to him through many other channels

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

than the reading of many rolls. His was a rich nature; observant, imaginative, poetic, and quickly responsive not only to those aspects of life which appeal to the senses, but equally to those which are significant of spiritual backgrounds and origins.

On the testimony of this book, it is obvious that he was no recluse. He moved through life with open eyes and a loving heart. The pages of the book are richly strewn with allusions to the life of town and country. They are not dragged in as formal illustrations, but fall naturally and spontaneously from the lips of one who was at home among them. He had watched the farmer in the field (4<sub>3</sub>), the children in the street (6<sub>11</sub>), and the refiner of silver sitting over his crucible (6<sub>27.30</sub>). He knew the strife of debtor and creditor (15<sub>10</sub>), the humiliation of the thief when caught (2<sub>26</sub>), the lamentations for the dead (16<sub>5</sub>), and the innocent festivities of brides and weddings (2<sub>32</sub>; 7<sub>34</sub>). A good idea of the variety and spontaneity of his allusions may be gained by reading a few chapters consecutively, and underlining each

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

illustrative reference. As in the first Psalm (compare Jer. 17<sup>s.s</sup>), later Bible writers are often his debtors for ideas or imagery.

These allusions throw much light on the man's temper and spirit. They are used with such appreciation and with such sympathy that one is forced to conclude that they reflect an appreciation and sympathy that noted them in the first place. As the illustrations used by Jesus reflect the country life of Palestine, and as those used by Paul reflect the highly organized life of the Roman city, so these illustrations used by Jeremiah reflect a very real background; and indirectly, but quite reliably, reveal much of his early experience and of his personal character. They portray him as a man at once discerning and friendly, one whose piety involved no asceticism, and one whose directness of appeal or rebuke, in later life, was based on thorough knowledge of the habits and limitations, the needs and possibilities, of those whom he addressed.

His ability to make effective use of his

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

early experience was due largely to intellectual powers at once reflective and alert. Here again the true order of development must be emphasized. He was a thinker before he was a prophet, or, one might almost say he became a prophet because he was first a thinker. While such a statement is, of course, inadequate as an account of the whole fact, it is one which is essential. The intellectual vigor of the prophets generally has been submerged in their religious importance. For downright intellectual acuteness, and for mental powers that gave them a firm grasp of difficult situations, they have no superiors in the Old Testament. One cannot read the first chapter of Jeremiah's book without realizing that this great soul dares to challenge even a divine impulse until consent can be based upon conviction. This attitude is conspicuous throughout his career.

On the other hand, Jeremiah shared with the other great prophets their condemnation of a religion that was unintelligent or that grew out of ignorance. This has been ob-



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

scured, if not entirely hidden, from many an English reader of the Bible, through an unfortunate confusion of uses for the word "heart." In current figurative use this word stands for feelings and emotions, so that a heartfelt religion, or a "religion of the heart," is regarded as more earnest, more vital, and more valid than a form of religion that may be supposed to lack this "heart" element. The English Bible seems to confirm this view. The word is of frequent occurrence, and its contexts easily permit the piously passive mind erroneously to assume that when the Hebrew writer or speaker, 2500 years ago, used the word "heart" figuratively, he used it in the modern English sense. This confusion is as misleading as it is unfortunate; or, rather, it is unfortunate because it is so misleading. In the ancient, biblical use the heart was regarded as the seat of understanding, of the broad practical knowledge on the basis of which man orders his conduct in the life of every day. And this is Jeremiah's use of the word. Thus, the Hebrew expression, "came up upon my

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

heart," is the idiom, not for the modern, "I felt," but for, "it occurred to me" (compare Jer. 3<sub>16</sub>; 7<sub>31</sub>; 19<sub>5</sub>; 32<sub>35</sub>; Acts 7<sub>23</sub>). When Jeremiah represents Jehovah as saying, "I will give them an *heart* to *know*" (Jer. 24<sub>7</sub>), he speaks the same idiom as Jesus himself, who said, "Out of the *heart* proceed . . . *thoughts*" (Mark 7<sub>21</sub>).

This Hebrew usage did not grow out of any lack of words by which to express the ideas of warmth, earnestness, or emotion. These phases of the life of the spirit were supposed to have their seat in the reins or kidneys or bowels. The modern expression, "heart and mind," the Hebrew would render as, "reins and heart" (Jer. 11<sub>20</sub>). Occasionally, as at Jer. 17<sub>9,10</sub>, the translators have gone beyond their strict duty of translation and have given an interpretation of the words in question. The same ambiguity occurs in the New Testament, for example, Phil. 1<sub>8</sub>; 2<sub>1</sub>; where the English reader should compare the King James and the Revised Versions.

It is difficult, indeed, for the modern

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

reader to adjust himself to the Hebrew senses of English words, but this kind of necessity is inevitable in translations from any foreign language, and when, in the books of the prophets, the adjustment is once made, their spiritual values are seen in far clearer light, and an intellectual vigor is revealed that has been too long obscured. Jeremiah belongs in this intellectual fellowship, and the high position he holds in the gallery of the prophets is due, at least in part, to his mental gifts and to his intellectual power.

One other personal trait should be mentioned—and it is one not usually attributed to him—namely, his courage. He was bold and vigorous with a courage that was at once physical, intellectual, and spiritual. It was not a courage that was mere physical recklessness, but that deeper and more steadfast courage that is often found in refined and sensitive natures. In these courage has passed beyond mere physical abandon, springing out of an intense but transient excitement, and has become a splendid vigor

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

and endurance, depending on utter surrender to exalted principles clearly seen and firmly grasped.

It was by virtue of such high-souled bravery that Jeremiah was able to withstand isolation and persecution. His book offers no complete list of the physical dangers into which he was forced, such as Paul gives in 2 Cor. 11<sub>24,27</sub>, but it reports at least two occasions when he was in danger of his life (Jer. 11<sub>18,20</sub>; 26<sub>8</sub>). He had also been placed in the stocks (Jer. 20). Once he was imprisoned and left to die (Jer. 37<sub>16,20</sub>), and at another time cast into a dungeon for the same fatal purpose (Jer. 38<sub>4,6</sub>). But none of these things moved him. Not only was his message searching and uncompromising, but his courage matched his message.

He has been called "the weeping prophet." This is due in part to the supposition that he may have been the author of the book entitled *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*. But Milton is not a weeping poet because he wrote "Lycidas," nor is Tennyson a weeping poet because he wrote "In

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

Memoriam"; and neither is Jeremiah necessarily to be regarded as a weeping prophet because he may have written these touching lamentations, whose title, at least, is obviously from some hand other than his own. There are a few places in his book that mention him as weeping, or as wishing that he might weep (9<sub>1</sub>; 13<sub>17</sub>; 14<sub>17</sub>); but, surprising as it may seem, they are not more numerous than similar references to the apostle Paul (for example, Phil. 3<sub>18</sub>; Acts 20<sub>19</sub>). And, indeed, these scattered suggestions cannot stand against the direct and indirect testimony of the whole book.

As a matter of fact, Jeremiah wept, just as Paul wept, and just as every Oriental wept, and weeps to-day. But he was no such lachrymose weakling as might be supposed from the mild aversion with which he is regarded by some energetic Christians, and still less is he a proper subject for some of the cheap wit that claims him for its victim. Such a reputation is quite misleading and is contradicted by his whole history. He calls himself an assayer of the people, one in



## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

whose furnace the precious metal is separated from the dross. The word of God was in his heart "like a fire, and like a hammer that shatters the rock" (23<sub>29</sub>). He was, again in his own words, "an iron pillar, a fortified city, and brazen walls, against the whole land," and they fought against him but did not prevail (Jer. 1<sub>18,19</sub>; 15<sub>20,21</sub>). The opposition he aroused is alone a sufficient tribute to his force and vigor. Gentle and refined he was, but neither timid nor tearful. Sympathetic, alert, courageous, he is The Invincible Saint of the Old Testament, with the force of the Hammer, the consuming power of the Flame, and the inflexible strength of the Iron Column. It is these figures that must describe him, and it is thus his neighbors knew him.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Although Jeremiah is dealing with the most serious subjects, his discourses show a bewildering number and variety of illustrations drawn from all kinds of life. Examine chaps. 2 to 6, and write out a list of these allusions. For example, 2<sub>13</sub>, springs and cisterns; 2<sub>14f.</sub>, lions and their

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

prey; 2<sub>21</sub>, vines and their cultivation; 2<sub>22</sub>, the use of lye and soap; 2<sub>26</sub>, the thief; 5<sub>26</sub>, hunters and trappers; 6<sub>11</sub>, children, etc. Note that these are not the subjects of Jeremiah's special message; they are there because he thinks and speaks pictorially, and they illustrate what he has to say. Make your list as complete as possible. It will take more than one reading to do this.

Now read some modern sermon and compare the number and character of illustrative allusions with those in your list. Think over your own sermons and your own use of similar vivid illustrative glimpses of daily life. What kind of allusions are found in the modern sermon you read? in your own sermons? in Jeremiah? What light do such allusions throw upon the life and experience of the preacher who uses them? Where and how does he get them? Do you suppose Jeremiah used so many because he had chosen a definite homiletic method? Or because he was naturally observant, as a poet might be?<sup>1</sup> Write a statement embodying answers to these questions, stating also what modern sermon you read.

In order to learn from Jeremiah himself just what he means when he uses the word "heart," examine the following references: 3<sub>15</sub>f. (the word translated "mind" in 3<sub>16</sub> is "heart" in the He-

---

<sup>1</sup>He was such an observer as Browning sketches in "How It Strikes a Contemporary."

## MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

brew); 5<sub>21</sub>; 7<sub>31</sub> (this expression appears also at 19<sub>5</sub> and 32<sub>35</sub>); 11<sub>20</sub> (the Hebrew reads, "triest the reins and the heart"); 17<sub>9f.</sub> (the Hebrew reads, "search the heart, I try the reins"); 23<sub>16</sub>; 24<sub>7</sub>. Consider further what he meant by "knowledge," as indicated in 2<sub>8</sub>; 4<sub>22</sub>; 9<sub>3,6,23f.</sub>; 24<sub>7</sub>. In view of all these references, what kind of knowledge is he interested in? Knowledge of science, philosophy, or art? Do these references indicate that he is concerned with the way the people "feel," or with what they think and do? Can you find references indicating that he was concerned with how people "felt" toward Jehovah and religion? Is it possible that he took feelings and intentions for granted? If so, how would this attitude relate itself to his emphasis on knowledge? Write a statement covering answers to these questions, and in the light of these references, and of your own answers, set down as definitely as possible just what he meant in 29<sub>13</sub> and 31<sub>33f.</sub>

## CHAPTER III

### THE PERFECT PATRIOT

JUDAH'S INDIAN SUMMER—THREE POLITICAL GROUPS—FALSE PROPHETS—FIRST AND SECOND CAPTIVITIES—THE DOWNFALL OF THE NATION.

IT is impossible to separate a prophet, or any other man, from the time in which he lives. He not only belongs there as a historical fact, but his interests and his hopes are there; and only with reference to these can his place and work be properly estimated. Jeremiah, like all the other prophets, conceived religion in national terms; and it was inevitable that he should be deeply concerned with national affairs. It was equally inevitable that a man who thought clearly, felt strongly, and spoke fearlessly should come into collision with those who disagreed with him, especially when the subjects of debate concerned religious principles and national policies. Jeremiah's gifts and aims made it impossible for him to remain an obscure lay-

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

man or a silent citizen. He was foreordained to leadership, and soon became a man with whom the authorities were compelled to reckon. From early manhood to the close of a long and strenuous life he lived in the glare of publicity; and during all that time his influence was operative in court and temple. While for Jeremiah and his contemporaries religion and politics were inseparable, a separation is nevertheless convenient for purposes of discussion, and this chapter will be devoted to some of the political aspects of the period in which Jeremiah lived.

The outward course of events, while freighted with serious consequences, is not obscure. The so-called "nation" of Judah was really such a small affair that it is almost amusing to call it a nation. It was more like a single Swiss canton lying almost negligible between France on the one side and Austria on the other. For Judah lay between two great empires, Egypt on the south and west, and Assyria on the east and north; and the relative ascendancy of these



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

two major powers constituted the main factor in the petty politics of the diminutive kingdom of Judah. It was plainly the part of wisdom for Judah to maintain the friendliest possible relations with the dominant power. But this plan was not without its perplexities, for although Egypt was closer, Assyria's greater distance was offset by her greater power. Alliance with Egypt seemed more logical, but opposition to Assyria was more dangerous.

In the earlier part of Jeremiah's career, during the reign of Josiah, a new element was introduced into the situation, which made the whole problem more confusing than ever. Troubles arose in the Mesopotamian valley. The power of Assyria began to decline. But this did not mean that Judah would be released from eastern influence; for it soon appeared that Babylon, Assyria's neighbor and rival on the south, would soon be strong enough to possess herself of the power and prestige which Assyria had so long possessed. The approaching fall of Assyria would thus effect, not the in-

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

dependence of Judah, but simply an exchange of eastern masters. This shifting of the centers of power in the east gave rise to all kinds of speculations and proposals in Jerusalem; and as such great movements as these are not consummated in a moment, there was plenty of time for proposals of different policies, and the formation of corresponding parties supporting them. On the whole, the situation was favorable to Judah; and a great feeling of relief pervaded the little kingdom. The Assyrian-Babylonian difficulties between each other made an extensive western campaign by either power out of the question. Thus Judah, for the time being, had nothing to fear from the east. At this time also Egypt was quiescent as far as Judah was concerned, so that during the whole of Josiah's long reign of thirty-one years comparative peace prevailed.

It was a kind of Indian summer for Judah. Her king was wise enough and strong enough to avail himself of the opportunity to build up his cities and to extend his

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

boundaries; and Judah, during this period, reached her highest point of prosperity. Toward the close of the reign, however, Egypt awoke, and planned a great eastern campaign. She apparently intended to secure a share of any spoil that might be snatched from Assyria, who was at last tottering to her fall. Egypt's route for this adventure lay northward along the coast, swinging eastward, past the shoulder of Judah, across the plain of Esdraelon. For some unexplained reason Josiah, with his utterly inadequate Judæan forces, tried to block the way. The two armies met at Megiddo; Josiah's army was routed; and he himself was killed (2 Kings 23<sup>29, 30</sup>; 2 Chron. 35<sup>20-24</sup>).

The name of this famous battlefield deserves a passing word. Most of the great battles of Palestine were fought there. Mount Megiddo (Hebrew, *Har Megiddo*) rose from its southern border. Later seers, looking forward to a final conflict between the forces of good and evil, regarded this place as the ideal spot for that dramatic

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

event. Greek translators, combining the two Hebrew words, produced the term, Armageddon, which has become familiar as the place for the final "battle of the Lord."

At the death of Josiah, Judah came definitely under Egyptian sway. The youthful Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, whom the Judæans had immediately placed upon the throne, was not acceptable to the victorious Pharaoh; and after a brief reign of but three months, he was carried away to Egypt, to die there in exile. While there is little in Jeremiah's book that throws light on his own attitude during this period, there is at least a touching lament over the young prince whose career was so tragic and so brief.

"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him;

But weep sore for him that goeth away;  
For he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

He shall not return thither any more;  
But in the place whither they have led him away shall he die,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

And shall see this land no more" (Jer. 22<sub>10,12</sub>).

Egypt placed on the throne of Judah another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim by name. This is the Jehoiakim who destroyed the first roll which Jeremiah wrote, as described in chapter 36. Jeremiah comes into greater prominence during the eleven years of this king's luxurious, self-indulgent reign. At this time it became clear to Jeremiah and his friends that affairs in Judah were on the decline. For three years Judah submitted to Egypt. But at the great battle of Carchemish, in 605, the Egyptian power was broken, and Judah was compelled to pay tribute to Babylon. After three annual payments Judah revolted from her new master and stopped the tribute. By this time, however, Babylon was on her feet, and in no mood to look complacently upon such independence; so that, in 597, Nebuchadnezzar started westward on a campaign whose real goal was Egypt, but which would incidentally permit him to bring disobedient Judah to terms. Jehoiakim defeated poetic



## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

justice and escaped Babylon's wrath, by dying just as Nebuchadnezzar approached Jerusalem. The blow fell on the son who succeeded him.

Within the little nation, during this rather tragic succession of events, various states of mind developed. Politically speaking, three parties can be distinguished, representing three distinct points of view regarding Judah's relation with foreign powers.

Ever since the days of Isaiah, a century before this time, there had been in Jerusalem a strong party in favor of an alliance with Egypt. Its platform was plausible. Egypt was near at hand, near enough to be immediately dangerous, but also quite strong enough to give high probability to the prospect of a successful resistance against Assyria, and later against Babylon. There was, further, at least one good reason why this would have been desirable for Egypt. In view of this constant danger of a western invasion on the part of one of the Mesopotamian powers, it would be highly advantageous for Egypt to have a friendly king-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

dom, such as Judah might be, stand as a kind of buffer state between Egypt's frontier and a threatening invader. It is not at all unlikely that the activities of this Egyptian party in Jerusalem may have been instigated and encouraged from time to time by direct, if not conspicuous, representatives of Egypt's Foreign Office. Naturally, this party would be strongly opposed to Babylon, and would be ready to encourage and to support any movement looking toward a revolt from Babylon, such as that actually carried out by Jehoiakim. Jeremiah, however, realized the futility of reliance upon Egypt, and discouraged any such policy with his accustomed vigor. It is not surprising, therefore, that this party recognized him as an opponent from the first.

2 A second party, and one which was not long in discovering that it could not count on Jeremiah's support, took the ground of "no entangling alliances." This position was supposedly based upon high principles of patriotism and religion. As patriots, the members of this party stood for Judah's in-

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

dependence. It was a political patriotism, but none the less popular on that account. As far back as the nation's history could reach, the high tides of prosperity had synchronized with the successful casting off of every foreign yoke; and the appeal to the glories of the past is always a popular appeal. A century earlier Isaiah had dared to assert the inviolability of Jerusalem, even when the Assyrian army was almost at her very doors; and his faith had been marvelously vindicated. In that unforgettable event Jehovah had shown that Zion was secure. He was her defense. In this later time, reliance upon the same divine support might well be regarded as an act of most loyal faith, while scorn of the foreigner might seem the truest patriotism. Jeremiah, however, did not overlook the serious possibility that circumstances might have arisen since Isaiah's day which would no longer justify the preservation of the Holy City. He was willing to leave the way open for new applications of divine principles, and unwilling to regard Jehovah as com-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

mitted to any local precedent. This attitude necessarily made Jeremiah an uncertain quantity in the eyes of the politically minded patriots. These, cherishing the doctrine of Jerusalem's eternal, divine protection, naturally regarded Jeremiah as a dangerous man, and as one whose religion, as well as his patriotism, was of doubtful loyalty.

The best known representatives of this party constitute a group of men familiarly known as the false prophets. They seem always to have been in the majority, and always to have stood for the conservative program, whatever that happened to be. They were staunch supporters of the government. It is a matter of real regret that there survives no account of them from one of their own number. The only references to them occur in the writings of their opponents and critics, the true prophets. But it is obvious that this easy classification into true and false does not tell the whole story. It is hardly credible that these so-called false prophets spoke or thought of themselves as

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

false. They may have been as earnest as they were mistaken; but in that case the term "false" would apply to their points of view, and to the advices based on them, rather than to their moral character. It would be interesting to know their view of the "true" prophets. In the absence of evidence it is idle to speculate, and little more can be affirmed than that they supported the powers-that-be. The men of such a party were inevitably distrustful of an independent thinker like Jeremiah, while he, on his part, did not hesitate to condemn them and their policies.

The third party would consist of Jeremiah and his friends, although it is hardly probable that they thought of themselves as constituting a party at all. They might be called idealists, but not with any suggestion that they were lacking in practical good sense. The course of events showed that their ideas were far more practical than those of their opponents; but, of course, until the events had transpired the question of plans and policies remained open for



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

debate. Of those who formed this select party the names of a few are known: Jeremiah, Baruch, Uriah (Jer. 26<sub>20-23</sub>), the men named in chapter 36, and perhaps Ezekiel, who was certainly in Jerusalem at this time. On moral and religious, rather than on political grounds, this party favored submission to Babylon. They preferred to see Judah submit, with a prospect of being left in peace for the development of justice and of true religion, to seeing her play politics with Egypt and pride herself on formal piety. They placed morality above nationality, and preferred to see their little state work out her religious salvation rather than her political independence. The adherents of one or another of these parties probably include most, if not all, who had any influence on the national policies during this period. These influences continue operative up to the final catastrophe; and the outward course of events may now be resumed.

Jehoiakim had died with Nebuchadnezzar at the gates of Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, his son, was another unfortunate. Like his

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

uncle, Jehoahaz, he was destined to hold the throne but three months, and then be led away into exile. Three months the city held out against Nebuchadnezzar; but it was a losing game, and the young king was forced to surrender. He, his mother, his wives, his nobles, and ten thousand of the best people of the nation were carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 24<sup>8,16</sup>). In spite of the fact that the national existence dragged along for a dozen years after this, the little state never recovered from this blow. This is sometimes called the first captivity (B. C. 597). It took away the flower of the nation, and was the beginning of the end.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw clearly that it was only an inferior stock that remained. Ezekiel, who was among those taken into exile at this time, though deeply concerned with the subsequent fate of the city, never alludes to those who had been left behind. For him only that part of the nation that was now carried away was the real nation, and it is with that group only that he concerns himself. Jeremiah's atti-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

tude presents an interesting contrast with Ezekiel's. On the one hand he sees as clearly as Ezekiel the inferiority of those who remained behind. In chapter 24 he describes the exiles as "good figs," while those who were left in Palestine were "bad figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so bad"; in other words, no good. But, on the other hand, his love for the people who were left keeps him true to them. He does not ignore them as Ezekiel does; he stays with them in their losing game. This fact is vital in any adequate interpretation of Jeremiah's words about the bad figs. Such words are to be regarded as the statement of an opinion rather than as a formal announcement. It is not necessary to suppose that Jeremiah proclaimed this sort of thing from the housetop, although he would have no hesitation in doing so if he felt that any good end would be served by such a proclamation. The passage places itself at some time subsequent to the departure of the exiles, long enough afterward for the temper of those who were left to have manifested itself, and

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

reflects, rather, Jeremiah's answer to the sort of question Baruch might easily have raised as to the outlook for those in exile and for those at home.

When Nebuchadnezzar started east with his captives he left on the throne Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, and uncle of the young captive, Jehoiachin. This Zedekiah seems to have been of an easy disposition and inclined to piety, but he was quite dominated by the Egyptian party (Jer. 37<sup>3,17</sup>; 38<sup>4,5,14,16,24,26</sup>). After a few years of uneasy rule he flies in the face of Providence by revolting against the great power that had placed him on the throne. This sealed the doom of king, city, and nation. Nebuchadnezzar again came against the city, took it, took Zedekiah and another host of captives away with him; and, as a last stroke, demolished the city itself (chapters 21; 34; 37-39). Only the veriest handful remained, and these, after assassinating a native ruler, fled to Egypt, dragging Jeremiah with them (chapters 40-43).

With the exception of the brief, brilliant,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

heroic days of the Maccabees, some four centuries later, the Hebrews never revived their national existence. By the time permission to return was given, the hopes and aims of the people were quite transformed. Their supreme interests had become ecclesiastical rather than national. Their leader was not a king, but a high priest. The state had become a church.

During the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah the position of Jeremiah in Jerusalem had become more and more precarious, as he came into sharper and sharper conflict with the courtiers and politicians. He was a marked man; and it is impossible to understand how he could have escaped such a fate as, for instance, that of Uriah (Jer. 26<sub>20-23</sub>), if he had lacked friends who were not only loyal but ready and able to provide him with places of concealment when the dangers grew especially acute. At times he may have had friends at court (38<sub>7,10</sub>), but most of his friends were connected with the temple (26<sub>24</sub>; 35<sub>4</sub>; 36<sub>10</sub>; 40<sub>9</sub>). While it is quite obvious that it was through these that Jeremiah was



## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

hidden away from the outbursts of royal wrath, the devout writer of Jer. 36<sup>26</sup> puts the thing in a nutshell when he says, "Jehovah hid him." Such biblical expressions plainly include, rather than deny, the use of human agencies. Of his ultimate fate nothing is known. There is an uncertain tradition that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Egypt.

The national downfall was as pathetic as it was tragic; and one cannot read the story, even now, without being moved to sympathy for the hapless people. And if at this late day among an alien people such sympathy should be aroused, it is not surprising that a man like Jeremiah, stirred by the ties of race and religion and by the promptings of a great soul, should have pleaded with them, borne with them, and remained with them to the bitter end. He shines like a star through the gathering clouds. He never lost his faith in God nor his love for his countrymen. When the last company was taken captive he had an opportunity to go to Babylon and be well treated (40<sup>1,6</sup>). His

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

counsels of submission were regarded by the Babylonians as a sign of friendliness. But he chose to remain with his own people, faithful to the last—only to perish at their hands.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

The historic background for Jeremiah's career is to be found in the parts of his book written by Baruch and in 2 Kings 22 to 25. Very few of the words of Jeremiah himself bear on the subject. They grow out of the historic situations, and apply to them, but they do not describe them. It would be well to note on the margin of your Bible at 2 Kings 22<sub>1</sub>, the date B. C. 639; at 22<sub>8</sub>, B. C. 621; at 23<sub>29</sub>, B. C. 608; at 24<sub>14</sub>, B. C. 597; at 25<sub>8</sub>, B. C. 586; and at 25<sub>27</sub>, B. C. 560.

The close relations that sometimes existed between Judah and Egypt are well illustrated in the incident described in Jer. 26<sub>20-24</sub>. Jeremiah's attitude toward Egypt appears in Jer. 2<sub>18,36</sub>; 4<sub>211,22</sub>; and 46<sub>3,26</sub>. Note his opinion of Josiah, 22<sub>15f.</sub>; of Jehoahaz, 22<sub>10,12</sub>; and of Jehoiakim, 22<sub>13f.</sub>, 17-19.

On the basis of Jer. 23<sub>9,32</sub>; Deut. 13<sub>1,5</sub>; 18<sub>15,22</sub>; 1 Kings 22<sub>1,28</sub>; Matt. 5<sub>12</sub>; 13<sub>57</sub>; 23<sub>29,31,37</sub>; 24<sub>11,24</sub> prepare a statement about prophets which will include answers to the following questions: Would people listen to prophets whom they knew to be false? Did the people have any difficulty

## THE PERFECT PATRIOT

distinguishing between true and false prophets? If there were no danger that the people would follow false prophets rather than true, would there be any point in these warnings and protests? If the fulfillment of a prophet's word was necessary to prove whether he were true or false, how could people tell which he was, before the time of fulfillment arrived? What value had miracles in indicating a true prophet? Did the true or false prophets make the larger popular appeal in their own day? Would it have been any easier then than now to tell a true prophet from a false? How would a true prophet determine whether another prophet were true or false? If God should raise up a true prophet to-day, how could he be recognized? Who would recognize him? What are your conclusions as to the (1) character, (2) desirability, and (3) popularity of a "prophetic ministry" to-day?

## CHAPTER IV

### A NATIONAL REVIVAL

THE BOOK FOUND IN THE TEMPLE—ITS RELATION TO THE GREAT REFORM MOVEMENT—SIGNIFICANT RESULTS—INFLUENCE ON SUBSEQUENT RELIGIOUS LIFE.

THE religious keynote of the period was sounded in the great reformation under Josiah. It was the last vital religious movement to occur while Judah still maintained a national existence. It not only supplied the germ out of which grew most that was characteristic in the subsequent religious life of the Jews; but its influence still abides, operative to the present day. Because of this far-reaching influence it is of more interest and of more importance than the purely political aspects of the period set forth in the preceding chapter. Without some familiarity with its course and character, it is impossible to understand the real meaning of the half century leading to the exile, or

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

adequately to appreciate its supreme hero, Jeremiah.

It came about in an unusual way. Josiah came to the throne as a child of eight years, placed there after a popular uprising which followed the assassination of his predecessor. The single verse of Scripture which relates Josiah's accession (2 Kings 21<sub>24</sub>) affords no clue as to the origin of the uprising, or the motive which led to the selection of Josiah for the throne. Eighteen years of his reign are passed over in silence.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that he was under the tutelage of some of the temple priests, perhaps of Hilkiah himself; so that he would be in preparation for definite support of the national religion as over against the widespread worship of foreign deities which had swept over the land during the preceding fifty years.

In the eighteenth year of his reign there was found in the temple a book whose contents filled its first readers with consternation. The book (strictly, a roll) purported to contain certain addresses

---

<sup>1</sup>2 Kings 22<sub>3</sub>.



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

of Moses delivered toward the close of the wanderings in the wilderness, and dealing with all sorts of laws and instructions which, ostensibly, were intended to guide the life of the people in Canaan from the time of Moses's death. To the horror of the readers, they realized that these instructions had not been followed, that the life of the people had been quite different from the demands set forth in the book, and that the difference had never been greater than at that moment. No time was lost in carrying the book to the king, who, on hearing the book's contents, immediately gave orders that the authority of the book be investigated. This was done by taking it to one "Huldah, the prophetess," who pronounced affirmatively, not, indeed, upon the authorship of the book, but on the authority of its demands.<sup>1</sup> In pursuance of these, and notwithstanding the serious and even violent changes which would be involved throughout the kingdom, the king at once set about putting into effect the civil and religious

---

<sup>1</sup>2 Kings 22<sub>14</sub>.

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

scheme of life outlined in this remarkable book. Reserving for the close of the chapter a more extended reference to this famous book, it is sufficient here to remark that the reforms<sup>1</sup> now undertaken correspond so closely to the requirements laid down in the biblical book of Deuteronomy that this epoch-making movement is often spoken of as the Deuteronomic Reform.

In considering the extent and influence of this historic movement one is surprised and disappointed at the lack of evidence that might account for its origin. It bursts upon the scene out of a clear sky. True, the book seems at first to supply a center from which the movement spread; but further consideration fails to find in any book, whatever book it may have been, a sufficient origin and authorization for such revolutionary activity. The idea that this book carried with it the authority of Scripture, as that is now regarded, breaks down in face of the fact that it was not recognized as having any authority until indorsed by "the prophet-

<sup>1</sup>They are described in 2 Kings 22-23<sub>25</sub>.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

ess"; while that single indorsement seems a very slight ground upon which to account for such an immediate and vigorous adoption of the book's contents.

It was the men behind the book who made the movement possible, and who carried it through. The book supplied the place that the kite string supplied in Franklin's familiar experiment: it became a conductor through which the lightning could be discharged. Events of this kind reach back to origins that are provokingly obscure. Some movement must have been on foot which, if it did not produce the book itself, was none the less ready to take immediate and effective advantage of its appearance.

The king himself, now in his twenty-sixth year, and strong enough to carry out the reform with vigor and success, could not, at the same time, have been so weak a character as to change his whole policy on the spur of the moment, even when that spur took the shape of a book indorsed by a prophetess. The changes are too violent. They involved too many upheavals in the social and reli-

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

gious customs of the community. The king must have been prepared for the step. Who prepared him? Who laid the train that produced this explosion?

The Hebrew writers are the last ones to interrogate on such a subject. They are concerned with results, not with processes and developments. The eighteen years whose story, as far as this subject is concerned, would be one of the most interesting in human history, are passed over literally without a word! These writers would be quite content to say of any such event, "The Lord did it." But while this may be satisfactory as a statement of ultimate agency, much light and inspiration would attend a knowledge of some of the means and methods the Lord used. The book has its proper place in the story, but it supplies an occasion rather than a cause; and the names of those really responsible must remain unknown. Whoever they were, they possessed a spiritual insight which revealed new depths in the religious life, a spirit which, speaking through the pages of Deuteronomy, pro-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

duced one of the most profoundly moving books in the Old Testament.

It would be impossible here to discuss this great reformation in any detail, but a few of its salient features must be indicated. Its guiding motive is loyalty to Jehovah; its guiding method, centralization. It was religion codified.

At this time Palestine was thickly strewn with sacred places. Sacrifice might be offered at innumerable stones, trees, springs, high places, and other shrines. Many of these were sacred to Jehovah; but many others were sacred to the gods of Canaan (the baals); and some, especially in and near Jerusalem, were devoted to the worship of foreign gods; for example, gods of Egypt, of Assyria, and elsewhere. The temple which Solomon had built in Jerusalem was, of course, an important shrine; but in the north were shrines of greater sanctity and higher antiquity. So that the temple at Jerusalem, up to the time of this reform, was only one of many places where Jehovah was to be worshiped, that is, where



## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

sacrifices could be offered to him. With Cromwellian directness one swift stroke abolished all sacrificial worship of Jehovah except at Jerusalem, and of all foreign deities anywhere. The principle of loyalty and the method of centralization here had their perfect work.

This step marked a real advance in the religious life of the people. The multiplicity of shrines of Jehovah had unconsciously and inevitably tended to the belief in different Jehovahs, corresponding to the different shrines; so that among the less thoughtful (and these are often in the majority) the way was open for an easy descent into polytheism. Centralization of worship at Jerusalem established an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual monotheism. It is not here asserted that monotheism in any true sense was established in the minds of the people by fiat. The point is, that with one shrine, Jerusalem, it was easy and natural to accept one Jehovah; and this was a first step toward the later monotheism.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

This advantageous side of the abolishment of all shrines but one was offset by a result which, while it could hardly have been foreseen, was none the less actual and unfortunate. Whereas, up to this time, the killing of an animal for food had always been a religious act, performed at some shrine and accompanied by sacrificial ceremonies, now, since it had been ordained that there could be no valid sacrifice except at Jerusalem, this act of everyday life was robbed of its religious significance and made "secular." To deprive any act of the common life of its divine sanction is a serious matter, and this was a vital case.

2 Another result of the centralization movement was the sudden increase in the importance of the priests at Jerusalem. Heretofore, they had the importance of those who officiated at a royal chapel. Now they had become the supreme directors of worship at the only shrine in the nation where sacrifice to Jehovah was to be regarded as valid. This gave them not only a religious importance that no Hebrew line of priests had

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

ever before possessed, but it gave them an authority which could have no rival. True, certain concessions were made on behalf of the priests who had been deprived of their office at the numerous shrines throughout the land, but this stopped far short of giving them an equality with the priests already installed at Jerusalem. For all but those at Jerusalem practical disfranchisement was the result.

One further feature of the reformation must be mentioned which, at the time, did not begin to take on the significance it is now seen to hold. This was the indorsement of the book by Huldah the prophetess. The authority thus given to a writing as such, introduced an entirely new element into the Hebrew religion, namely, the identification of divine revelation with a specific writing. Up to this time, it was commonly recognized that God made his will known through many channels, whether they were priests, kings, prophets, or "wise women." But it was always through a living person that the revelation was made. Coming through a living

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

person, the revelation naturally connected itself with the circumstances of the time in which the speaker lived; and it was never doubted that, with every new condition, God would thus make known his will concerning it. There is a surprising silence throughout all the Old Testament writings down to this time regarding any appeal to a previous writing that might be looked upon as a divine instructor or arbiter for any particular occasion.

For centuries, the prophets had been looked upon as proclaimers of the will (Word) of God. They did not base their exhortations upon previous writings, greatly as that would have strengthened their words. Now, however, with the discovery of this book, and its indorsement as embodying the divine will, the Hebrew religion was facing two serious innovations. One of these led to the gradual subordination of the place and work of the prophet. He would no longer be essential. The seeker after the will of God could go to the book. The other led to the substitution of the book for God; that

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

is, it came to be regarded as so perfectly the equivalent of God, as far as any revelation of the divine will was concerned, that to ask, "What is the will of God?" was equivalent to asking, "What is written?" The accessibility of the book easily furthered this practice.

One of the most serious consequences of these views of the book was the deepening conviction that revelation had reached its highest levels in the past. With the sole shrine at Jerusalem, and the Word in a book, it became less and less necessary to look for God elsewhere or later. This result did not, of course, appear immediately. Great prophets were still to arise. The hearts of the people were not yet entirely closed against the living word uttered by the mouth of a living prophet. But the movement had begun, and Jeremiah was one of the few in his generation, the only one as far as is known, who really understood the danger.

Externally, the reformation was a great success. Worship was centralized in Jerusalem, and the other shrines were forsaken,



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

at least by the pious. In contrast to the tone and spirit of the preceding half century, this was now an age of faith in Jehovah, and obedience to all that he had commanded. But all the commands in Deuteronomy could not receive equal obedience. Where they were definite, specific, and objective they were obeyed with enthusiasm, but where they touched matters of spirit and motive obedience was not so easy. One could not always say just how they were to be worked out. The result was that the external features of the book were welcomed, while the inner and more spiritual features were neglected.

Deuteronomy contains not only some of the most spiritual teachings to be found in the Old Testament, but also much matter dealing with ceremony and ritual. The former element represents the special interest of the prophet, and the latter that of the priest. In exhibiting this twofold character Deuteronomy but reflects two outstanding aspects of the religious life. It has always been easier to conform to a ritual than to

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

live according to moral and spiritual principles; so that the failure of the reform was not due to a fault peculiar to the Hebrews. The priest says, "Obey"; the prophet says, "Awake"; and of the two, most men prefer the former.

It is hard to believe that Jeremiah could hold aloof from this great movement, especially at the outset; and although the passage is not as definite as might be desired, Jer. 11<sub>1,8</sub> seems to indicate that at first he favored the movement and cooperated with it. It was not long, however, before he saw that while there was general obedience to the outer and formal demands of the book, the response to its spiritual ideals was either superficial or lacking. From Jeremiah's point of view the reform was missing its highest aim, and he withdrew his support from it.

His support of the reform at the beginning had not been unopposed. The new movement, which exalted the Jerusalem priesthood, at the expense of all other priests throughout the land, was one which Jere-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

miah could not support without apparent disloyalty to the priests of his own home, Anathoth. The feeling even ran so high that plots were laid against his life (11<sub>18-23</sub>). On the other hand he did not gain at Jerusalem the support he had lost at Anathoth, for it soon became evident that he was ready to criticize and to condemn the most popular elements of the movement which had so greatly increased the power and prestige of the Jerusalem priesthood. Jeremiah thus was placed in a position that was open to all kinds of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, as well as being one of personal danger. It must have been as difficult as it was unpopular for a man of light and leading to advance from a position which had already gained a certain following, and one which he himself had at first supported, to a higher one, more difficult and less popular. Jeremiah, however, was quite willing to discard a program which had shown itself to be defective. In doing this he took his place in the ranks of those sons of the Spirit whose influence never dies with the generation that

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

disapproved them. He was vindicated long ago. Many of his most daring positions are now accepted as matters of course. But if he were here to-day, he would be looking forward and not back, moving out beyond the lines of traditions and majorities, to new fields of truth and power which prophets alone discover. To understand him as he really was, one must have something of the spirit that would follow him were he here now.

NOTE.—A word should be added about the book of Deuteronomy. It has a twofold aspect. On the one hand it is plainly a collection of laws, many of them of high antiquity; on the other hand it contains long hortatory passages designed to urge the people to obedience. The desired obedience, however, is not regarded as imposed from without, by arbitrary command, but as springing spontaneously from hearts filled with gratitude to Jehovah for his loving care. It has been attributed to Moses; but the book nowhere purports to have been written by him, and it is quite incredible that the concluding chapter should have come from his hand. If this seems to detract from the worth and importance of the book, it should be remembered that (1) the value

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

of any book, even a book of the Bible, depends upon the truth of its contents rather than upon the name of the author, or one's knowledge of its authorship. And the undying glory of this book, whoever wrote it, is that it was the first book to apply to a body of laws an interpretation and an appeal based upon love and grateful loyalty.

(2) The ascription of the Psalms to David, and of the Proverbs to Solomon, shows how natural it was for the Hebrews, down to a much later date than the days of Moses, to attribute to some great name writings that had certain traits in common.

(3) It is worth while to repeat the statement made above, that to the Oriental (and the Hebrews were Orientals), teachings are of far more importance than biographical details about a teacher, or curious questions about literary proprietorship. It is through, and from, these Oriental minds that the sacred writings have come; and they must be approached from their own point of view.

The place of Moses is secure, and it finds its convincing testimony in the indelible impression he left upon his nation. The place of the Bible is also secure, by virtue of its inexhaustible supply of "reproof, correction, and instruction which is in righteousness," of inspiration, comfort and cheer. And it is a matter of profound gratitude that, as far as the Bible itself is concerned, the



## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

way is left entirely open for the investigation and discovery of all facts connected with its origin and transmission, in perfect confidence that the facts are what God meant them to be, however true or false popular ideas of them may be.

The application of this free yet reverent study to the book of Deuteronomy has led most scholars to the conclusion that it must have been written after the days of Isaiah and before the days of Jeremiah. This includes an interval of nearly a century, and it is impossible to be positive as to just where in that century the origin of the book is to be placed. Its preparation may have extended over many years, rearrangements and additions being made from time to time through a long period. It contains material that is undoubtedly ancient; but its most original element is the hortatory setting in which the older material is placed. Those interested in a fuller statement of the various aspects of the question should consult some such work as, Driver: Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Although Jeremiah was already prophesying when the Deuteronomic reform took place, there is nothing in his book that definitely refers to it or that indicates his attitude toward it, nothing that shows whether he was friendly, indifferent,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

or opposed. Perhaps this is no more surprising than the fact that Jeremiah makes no reference to Ezekiel, or that Ezekiel makes no reference to Jeremiah, although they were contemporaries.

There is no doubt that some of the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy are quite in the spirit of Jeremiah. But the reform was based on Deuteronomy as a whole, and there are other teachings in the book with which Jeremiah would have no sympathy. Jer. 8<sub>4,9</sub> and 11<sub>1,8</sub> are the only places that can be regarded as by any possibility referring to the subject, and the more carefully they are considered the less definite they are (cf. *C.B.*, pp. 61, 75).

An excellent illustration of Jeremiah's teaching in both his contrast and his agreement with Deuteronomy is found in chap. 7. It is characteristic of the confused and confusing arrangement of the book that the description of the occasion on which this address was delivered should be placed at chap 26<sub>1,19</sub>. The two passages, however, plainly belong together, and should be studied together.

In connection with 26<sub>1,19</sub>, note: (1) the epitome of the address; (2) the near-riot that it occasioned; (3) the statement that aroused the people's fury (cf. Acts 22<sub>22,24</sub>); (4) the report of the uproar reaches the court; (5) Jeremiah's courage; (6) the reference to the prophet Micah;

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

(7) the unique character of this reference (*C.B.*, p. 162). Reflect upon this incident as a sample of the sort of thing Jeremiah had to face more than once, and as a side-light upon the character of truly prophetic ministries.

Now consider the address itself (chap. 7). For the meaning of unfamiliar expressions, and, indeed, upon the whole passage, consult *C.B.* The significance of this great address will not appear upon a first reading, but its study will be worth all the time one can give to it. The address would be striking enough as a document intended for the present day; how it must have seemed to the people who heard it first, and for whose correction it was spoken, can only be imagined.

Back of v. 4 try to detect the scornful sarcasm of Jeremiah's voice as he ridicules the words which the people were saying in all seriousness. They had an idea that the temple offered a kind of magical security, a protection from all disaster. They based this on Isa. 37<sup>21,23,33,38</sup>. Jeremiah says the idea is false, it's a lie. Security is not to be found in a building but in a character. To-day he might say, "Do not estimate the goodness of your city by the number of its churches, but by the fairness and accessibility of your courts, and the welfare of the lower classes."

In vv. 5-7 he tells what the people ought or ought not to do. In vv. 8-10 he tells what they

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

are actually doing, and in words of classic power (v. 10b.) shows the great gulf which yawns between what their words say and what their acts mean. Amos had rebuked the people for their formal worship and their unethical conduct (Amos 5<sub>21-24</sub>), Isaiah had gone beyond Amos in mentioning the temple specifically (Isa. 1<sub>10-17</sub>), but it remained for Jeremiah to speak of the temple as a robbers' cave. It is a question whether either Amos or Isaiah would have gone that far.

The high-water mark of the chapter comes in vv. 21-23. Verse 21 is more scornful sarcasm, as much as to say, "Go on with your ceremonies if you want to; they don't amount to anything." Verse 22 is highly significant in view of the common opinion that an elaborate ritual had been provided for the Hebrews in the wilderness. Verse 23 says plainly that "the way" in which Jehovah would have the people walk was not one marked by sacrifices and ceremonies. Equally significant is the view of v. 25 that the people were not supposed to have learned the divine will from a written book but from living prophets, whom Jehovah had been sending "early and late." Deuteronomy had, indeed, taught the kind of conduct which Jeremiah here demands (Deut. 10<sub>12-22</sub>), but it had also taught the importance of the temple (Deut. 12<sub>2-14</sub>, 17<sub>1-19</sub>, 26<sub>f.</sub>), which Jeremiah so sternly denies. (cf. *C.B.*, p. xxxvi.)

## A NATIONAL REVIVAL

With the above suggestions as a starting-point, and on the basis of your own study, prepare a statement of: (1) What Jeremiah would really have the people do with the temple and the ritual; (2) his idea of the field in which true religion finds expression; and (3) the degree to which our church life to-day approaches these prophetic ideals.



## CHAPTER V

### CONFESSIONS

A PROPHET THINKS AND GROWS—"HIS CALL"—  
"WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?"—"IS IT ALL  
A MISTAKE?"—"SURE OF GOD."

IN Davidson's Old Testament Prophecy there is an extended discussion of the psychology of the prophet. Davidson has succeeded as well as any investigator, and far better than most, in penetrating the hidden processes of the prophetic consciousness. The understanding of prophecy is brought appreciably nearer when it is recognized that prophets, as well as other great men, are proper subjects of psychological study. Their psychology, however, would be a small concern, had it not been for the particular domain in which their spirits were active. Their insights and discoveries in the supreme matters of the character of God, and of the true life of man, are among the greatest marvels of history. These men, of an ob-

## CONFESSIONS

scure and insignificant Oriental race, are seen to be in the highest degree original. If genius be a proper term for a religious pioneer, it is preeminently applicable to the prophets. They possessed in an unusual degree the mysterious and commanding power to announce, for the first time, ideals and principles whose enduring worth is confirmed by their continued and increasing vitality.

The utterances of these religious leaders are presented with a directness and humility so sincere that the reader forgets to think of the speaker. The thing spoken absorbs the attention. A question is rarely raised regarding a prophet's inner experiences; whether, for instance, the prophet who so directly proclaims his, "Thus saith the LORD," ever doubted his own message, ever was betrayed by the facts of life into a challenge of the divine government of the world, or ever reached a point where he felt like laying down his task as all a mistake. Even if such a question should arise in a reader's mind, it is not often encouraged. The Bible

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

is not to be questioned! In the rare case where the question persists it seems a hopeless task to seek material out of which to construct an answer. The prophets as a class say so little of themselves that their personal lives are almost unknown. Only here and there is a hint available to indicate what manner of men they were. Least of all do they admit one into the psychological laboratory where hope and fear, doubt and trust, are fused into an all-conquering faith.

It is in this connection that the book of Jeremiah exhibits one of those aspects which give it its unique place in the Bible. Thanks to Baruch, the book contains a large number of passages which are, practically, pages from the spiritual diary written day by day on Jeremiah's heart, as he wrought and wondered, doubted and dared. It is these pages which may be called his confessions. They are set down, of course, without the introduction and explanation which a modern biographer would supply for such priceless documents. Baruch was a Hebrew, far more interested in a great leader

## CONFESSIONS

than in a psychological "case," and very much more interested in what the Master said than in any circumstances of time, place, or occasion.

It needs but a casual glance between the lines of these deeply interesting passages, to reveal the fact that they are intimate, personal, first-hand reports of the spiritual wrestlings and aspirations of one of the purest, noblest, most courageous souls that ever lived. The book of Job, in its portrayal of its famous hero, is one of the world's masterpieces; but that portrayal is a work of art. The hero of the book, whatever the Job of history may have been, is the creation of the inspired writer. In the book of Jeremiah, on the other hand, the great prophet speaks his own native language; but what he speaks strikes, more than once, a note so similar to that struck in the book of Job that one cannot avoid the question whether some of the raw material for the great drama was not gleaned from this vivid transcript from real life.<sup>1</sup> To study such utterances is to go

---

<sup>1</sup>For example, Jer. 20<sup>14-18</sup>; Job 3.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

beyond psychology. It is to deal with life, and to see how life, in its profounder issues and outlooks, is revealed in the experiences of just such daring and adventurous souls as the one the world knows under the name of Jeremiah of Anathoth. The message of such a soul is not to be buried under a foreign language, a distant country, and an ancient date. These are but accidents of history. The message is universal and for all time.

Logically and chronologically the prophet's career begins with a "call." By this is meant the culmination of the conviction in the prophet's mind that his life must be given to the proclamation of the divine will. Nothing is involved in the call regarding the channel through which it was received. The methods varied. The constant and determining factors were the conviction itself, and the surrender to it. The experience might be accompanied by a vision, or even seem to arise from it; but it never lacked the intellectual aspects of judgment and consent. Whatever the mystery here, it is not



## CONFESSIONS

of a kind to remove the experience itself from contact with other reasonable human experiences. All spiritual experiences are mysterious. No doubt an intensity of conviction is involved in the prophet's case which exceeds the ordinary experience of the common man. But this superiority is never such as to dehumanize the prophet, however far he may outstrip the common man in many ways.

The prophet's assurance of the validity of his call depended on his own inner response. He had a "will to believe." This did not obviate all possibility of error; for doubtless many a "false" prophet sincerely believed himself "called." Time alone could vindicate the conviction. This assurance, which waited on the event, was not for the prophet alone, but also for his contemporaries. Just as the prophet had to rely upon his own inner conviction as supplying a sufficient authority for his proclamation of his message, so his hearers, and especially those who became his followers, were compelled to rely upon their own judgment regarding the

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

authority of the prophet concerned. The means for the discovery or recognition of prophets then were no more definite or reliable than they are to-day. Many to-day never dream that real prophets may be now alive; and in the days of the Hebrew kingdom men lived and died without knowing that there had been a prophet among them. It is not without significance that no prophet tells of his "call" until later events had given sufficient grounds for regarding it as valid. Not until the prophet is matured and established is he ready to recount the initial steps of his surrender to the divine will. In the case of Jeremiah this is made quite clear by the narrative in chapter 36, which places the writing of the book at a time twenty-two years later than that upon which Jeremiah entered upon his prophetic career.

In placing the story of Jeremiah's call in the first chapter of the book, Baruch has observed the natural and proper order. The whole chapter is a marvel of clarity and of condensation. It reflects Jeremiah's high sense of the exalted character of the divine

## CONFESSIONS

message; and along with this, as a particular consequence, there is evident that inner reluctance to assume such a task, which, somewhat like Paul's "thorn in the flesh," humbled him and distressed him throughout his whole life.

### *Jehovah*

Before thy birth I knew thee and sanctified thee;

I have made thee a prophet to the nations.

### *Jeremiah*

Ah, Lord Jehovah, I am no speaker;

I am but a youth.

### *Jehovah*

Say not, I am but a youth;

But go to whom I send thee,

And speak what I command thee.

Do not fear them,

For I am with thee to deliver.

*(touching Jeremiah's lips)*

I place my words in thy mouth.

To-day I set thee over nations and kingdoms,

To tear up and break down,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

To annihilate and to demolish,  
To build and to plant.

(on another occasion)

*Jehovah*

Jeremiah, what seest thou?

*Jeremiah*

A branch of an almond tree.

*Jehovah*

Thou seest well:

I watch over my word till it comes to pass.  
(Jer. 14.12.)

The dramatic form of the narrative must not obscure its purport, nor give the impression that an audible dialogue necessarily took place. The intent is to portray an inner, spiritual experience, for whose description the Hebrew lacked psychological terminology or philosophic interest. When the highly dramatic method is once recognized as a literary method only, the profound significance of the story at once becomes clear. With a few concise, vivid touches it pictures a man who is, in the first place, deeply responsive to God, and eager to discover and to obey the divine will. In the second place,

## CONFESSIONS

however, this man sees clearly enough the hardships, the persecutions, the ostracism, and the defeats that attend the course of any such call. Finally, he is keenly aware of qualities in himself that would hinder rather than help. He is aware of the questionings that weaken action, of the hunger for sympathetic and peaceful fellowship, and of the feeling of helplessness that threatens to unnerve the strongest souls when confronted by almost superhuman tasks.

This keen self-analysis was purified and ennobled by a humility which ignored all trace of any favorable qualifications for divine service which might reasonably have been considered. If for no other reason than that he had persisted through a quarter century of this service before this account was written, he might have alluded to the fact that he had at least some qualities of endurance, and that he could prove steadfast to his message, whatever his success. But even this modest suggestion is lacking.

Still another characteristic appears in this self-revealing passage. In verses 11 and 12,



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

there is a reflection of the poet's response to the beauties of nature. It is one of those unfortunate places whose point is quite lost in translation. Early in January the almond tree of Palestine throws out its blossoms. It is the first of the trees to announce the passing of winter and the coming of spring. The Hebrews called it the wakeful, or watchful tree. Jeremiah knew it and loved it; and between the lines one can read the story of the day when, stirred in spirit, he drank in the early beauty of the Flowers of Watchfulness, while there flashed into his soul the thought of God as the Great Watcher. As a saturated solution crystallizes at a touch, Jeremiah's own wakefulness to the beauty of the world about him touched his full heart into an assurance as definite and as clear as crystal, that his reliance upon the One Who Watched over all things, would never be put to shame.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>"The hope in dreams of a happier hour  
Which lights on misery's brow,  
Springs from the silvery almond flower  
Which blooms on a leafless bough."

(Moore: "Lalla Rookh.")

## CONFESSIONS

The remainder of the chapter shows how impossible it is to separate the work of the prophet from his own time and place. Jeremiah never supposed himself called to announce the divine will in a timeless, abstract way. His thoughts and efforts were ever directed to his own people and his own time. Even if he looked onward into the future, it was for their sakes, that he might stir them up to purer purpose, truer thinking, and more spiritual obedience.

Jeremiah's steadfast obedience to his call did not mean that he was able to preserve a perfect serenity of spirit throughout his long, dangerous career. That nervous, inquiring spirit advanced to the discovery of religious problems which would never have arisen for a more passive and contented piety. Times came when the inequalities of life, the welfare of the wicked, and the ill fare of the good, forced upon his mind questions which had never been formulated before. The facts may have been seen, but they had aroused no speculative reactions. Here first, first at least among the Hebrew

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

writers, appears one who sees the perplexities involved in the facts, and who, having seen them, dares to grapple with them. The challenge here thrown down to Providence seems a bold one even to-day. How must it have seemed then!

“Righteous art thou, O Jehovah, when I  
strive with thee;

Yet concerning justice must I speak with  
thee:

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked  
prosper?

Wherefore are they without care that deal  
treacherously?

Thou hast planted them and they have taken  
root;

They increase and bring forth fruit:

Thou art near in their mouth, but far from  
their reins” (Jer. 12<sub>1,2</sub>).

This is not the place to discuss the problem itself, but only Jeremiah's attitude toward it. In the first place, he saw that it was there; and, in the second place, he did not evade it. It might be added that neither did he solve it; but that does not detract

## CONFESSIONS

from his originality. The recognition of such a problem was a much greater novelty then than it is now; and it is against the background of his own day that the greatness of Jeremiah is to be estimated. His call to be a prophet involved no immunity from the perplexities of life; and the greater the prophets were, the more clearly they recognized the perplexities. It is significant that no inconsistency is felt between a "call" and this questioning attitude. Deeper than its apparent daring was the trust that permitted such freedom. And it was this trust, rather than any abstract or categorical answer to the question, that saved and sustained Jeremiah.

Strictly speaking, the deepest questions of life are insoluble; but, when they seem about to block all further progress, God shows, now in one way, now in another, that life is still livable, progress still possible, and trust still triumphant. This was the only answer Jeremiah received. It was not a solution; but it was a way out. He found a new meaning in his conviction that God knew his

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

trials, and "would be in trouble with him" (Psa. 91<sub>15</sub>); and he shows his own greatness of soul in accepting this answer as saving the situation, even if it did not solve the problem.

It was at a later time that a kindred question forced itself upon him in a still more personal way. If ever anyone had a valid excuse for desiring vindication, Jeremiah was that one; and the cry of 15<sub>15,18</sub>, is both intelligible and pardonable.

### *Jeremiah*

O Jehovah, remember me, attend to me,  
And on thine own behalf avenge me of my  
persecutors;

Let me not be overcome through thy forbearance with them.

It is for thy sake that I am humiliated  
By those who scorn thy words.

To me thy words were joy,  
And the delight of my thoughts,  
For thy name is upon me,  
O Jehovah of Hosts.

Why is my pain unceasing



## CONFESSIONS

And my wound incurable?  
Wilt thou fail me at the last,  
As a mirage that mocks the traveler in his  
thirst?

*Jehovah*

If thou wilt truly return to me, I will re-  
ceive thee,

And thou shalt again be my servant:

If thou speakest noble things without  
baseness,

My words shall again be in thy mouth.

(Jer. 15<sub>15f.</sub>,<sub>18,19</sub>).

This cry did not grow out of morbid self-regard nor stubborn self-sufficiency. He dared to give it utterance because he trusted God deeply, and with great freedom. One of his heaviest burdens had been to stand aloof from human fellowship, forced to isolation not by unfriendliness but because his attitude and his message provoked opposition, and tended to alienate him from his fellows (compare 15<sub>10</sub>; 16<sub>2,5</sub>). And it all seemed to have come to nothing! Had Jehovah betrayed him?

Here, again, the divine answer is an indi-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

rect one. Jeremiah is simply shown more clearly the condition under which he serves, namely, absolute purity of heart. The supreme call is not to overcome enemies, but to "stand before Jehovah" (verse 19); and this is to be reached only through self-criticism and self-correction. If Jeremiah in spiritual things, working like some assayer with an alloy, will purge away the dross of earthly weakness and passion, and bring forth what is pure and true, then he shall stand before Jehovah and Jehovah will sustain him (15<sub>19-21</sub>). As a later and greater Teacher said, "The pure in heart shall see God." There was thus awakened the conviction, wrought out in actual experience, that God not only accepts but honors a service accompanied by doubt and question when these lead to spiritual self-correction. These are not necessarily signs of depravity, nor even of spiritual danger. And Jeremiah was learning that through and by means of questions, a peace and a hope might be gained which, with the questions suppressed, might be lost forever.

## CONFESSIONS

Most striking of all these confessions, is the one found at 20<sub>7-13</sub>. Of this it has been said, "It is one of the most powerful and impressive passages in the whole of the prophetic literature, a passage which takes us, as no other, not only into the depths of the prophet's soul, but into the secrets of the prophetic consciousness" (Peake, Commentary on Jeremiah).

### *Jeremiah*

Thou didst entice me, Jehovah, and I  
yield;

Thou hast laid hold of me and hast con-  
quered.

I have become a continual laughing stock,  
Everyone mocks me.

For whenever I speak I must cry out  
Against villany and outrage,

Until the word of Jehovah has become a  
reproach to me,

And nothing but mockery.

But if I say, "I will not mention Him,  
"Nor any longer speak in His name,"

Then my heart begins to glow,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

A flame of fire sweeps through me,  
And I cannot keep silence (Jer. 20<sup>7,8</sup>).

The large subject of the psychology of prophecy is, at best, elusive. Sufficient reference has already been made to it. The center of interest here is, rather, Jeremiah himself and his self-revelations. Here, in a few powerful strokes, he has portrayed both his weakness and his strength, his humiliation and his glory. On the one hand is the bitterness of soul due to the apparent failure of his message, but on the other hand there is the unswerving trust in the power of Jehovah to fulfill the word which, after all, was not Jeremiah's but Jehovah's. This ultimate confidence that the work was God's work, not his own, was Jeremiah's sole but sufficient support through all his courageous, hard-fought life. He was very sure of God. At times his feelings might give way for a moment, but it was for a moment only. He always came back to the courage, loyalty, purity, and trust of the true servant of God.

History has given Jeremiah a vindication

## CONFESSIONS

far beyond any he ever imagined or desired. Not only in his proclamation of a divine message, but even more in the inner, personal experiences which these confessions reveal, is he the spiritual ancestor not only of the One who prayed, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" and, "If it be possible, let this cup pass," but also of all those who have learned that the revolt of the soul against traditional doctrines often indicates faith's vigor rather than faith's decay. Instead of being a sign that faith is lost, it may well be a sign that faith is vital and vigorous; and through these "Confessions" this larger view of faith has entered into the general heritage of all believers.

Out of these deep personal experiences there came also, for Jeremiah and for everyone since his day, a development of the idea and practice of prayer that is one of Jeremiah's most significant contributions to the rich treasure of religious experience. None before him had so definitely crossed the line separating the narrower and more popular idea of prayer as simple petition from that



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

larger, diviner field of fellowship with God, in which communion and inspiration find fullest play. Jeremiah asked little; he prayed much. "He was the father of that true prayer in which the soul speaks its human need and its heavenly trust."

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

A significant expression of Jeremiah's personality is seen in 8<sub>4</sub> to 9<sub>1</sub>. The general purport of the passage is given in *C.B.*, p. 59. Note that: (1) Jeremiah holds that religion ("the law of Jehovah") is, or ought to be, as native to man as the instinct in birds which directs their annual flights; Jeremiah has observed the wild life about him; he has also looked into the heart of man; (2) the change of speakers in vv. 13-17 makes the passage striking and vivid: v. 13, Jehovah is the speaker; v. 14f., the people; v. 16 gives a terrifying glimpse of the approaching devastation; v. 17, Jehovah speaks again; (3) v. 20 refers to deliverance from the threatened danger, not to the theological salvation of later Christian teaching; (4) 9<sub>1</sub> is really (as in the Hebrew text) the last verse of chap. 8; (5) Jeremiah speaks his own feeling in vv. 18, 21-23; in vv. 19f. he tells what he imagines he hears his people saying as they are carried away captive by the enemy re-

## CONFESSIONS

ferred to in v. 16 (the King, in v. 19, is Jehovah); the last question in v. 19 is spoken parenthetically by Jehovah.

The more carefully this passage is considered the more clearly the spirit of Jeremiah may be discerned. He is not only distressed but he is deeply perplexed by the backwardness of the people (vv. 4-7). It is characteristic of him that he not only observes the actions of the people but that he also tries to fathom their reasons and motives. One element of his greatness is his persistent progress into the very citadel of man's soul as he traces out the hidden sources of the actions he condemns.

To superficial readers the closing paragraph (vv. 18-23) easily lends itself to that popular but erroneous conception of Jeremiah which regards him as a weeping prophet. As a matter of fact, these words represent him not as weeping, but as wishing that he could. After all, are these expressions to be taken in such a baldly literal fashion? They spring from a heart surcharged with devotion to a people of whom he is one, for whom he is deeply concerned, and whose fate fills him with alarm. The words of many of our current hymns are more extravagant than these, and probably none would be more surprised than the writers if their words were taken in this literal way.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

Note, however, that this paragraph contains nothing to indicate that it was addressed to a general public. According to chapter 36, Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation. But Baruch was more than a mere amanuensis (Jer. 43<sub>3</sub>), and there is no reason to suppose that every word he set down was part of some great formal oration. Why should he not also set down precious recollections of words spoken to him alone, or at most to a small group of intimate friends, especially when these words dealt with the very essence of Jeremiah's thought and teaching? The words of Jesus reported in the Gospels were not all spoken from the mountaintop; neither were the words of Jeremiah that Baruch reported all delivered in some important address at the temple. Jeremiah would naturally speak freely to his nearest friends on the subjects so close to all their hearts, and would feel no restraint in letting them know how deeply he felt about it all. Such a passage as this represents Jeremiah's own self-questioning, his own perplexity, and his own unflinching pursuit of underlying causes. Properly to appreciate his words, and the spirit of the man who spoke them, one would need to go to the quiet corner of a house roof in distant, ancient Anathoth, and there, in the cool of the day, "listen in" as Jeremiah and his tried and trusted friend Baruch, with earnest tone and measured speech, commune with each

## CONFESSIONS

other heart to heart, as "deep calleth unto deep."

Make a list of the passages in Jer. 13 to 16 which were probably public utterances, and another list of those of a more private character.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

JEREMIAH'S ADVICE COMPARED WITH ISAIAH'S—  
JEREMIAH'S NEW AND DIFFICULT TASK—HIS  
ATTITUDE TOWARD IT—THE REAL NEED.

THE work of Jeremiah was not simply a repetition of that of the great prophets of the eighth century. It was inevitable that he should have much in common with them, and reiterate many of their demands. But as many of the conditions which they had faced had passed away, Jeremiah found himself confronted with new problems which they had not solved. In illustration of this it is worth while to refer again, somewhat more fully, to the contrast already pointed out between the attitude of Isaiah and that of Jeremiah toward the divine purpose regarding Jerusalem. It is embodied in the different policies these prophets urged the nation to adopt toward the imperial invaders from the East. During the reign of Hezekiah the



## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

Assyrians under Sennacherib made an extensive western campaign, in the course of which it looked as though Jerusalem would be swallowed up. With the Assyrian forces almost at the gates of the city, Isaiah had dared to advise Hezekiah to refuse to surrender, on the ground that Jerusalem was the chosen city of Jehovah, and that he would protect her. The event vindicated Isaiah's daring faith. The Assyrians withdrew leaving Jerusalem untouched.

A century later, in the days of Jeremiah, the Babylonians were on the way to repeat the tactics of the Assyrians. But Jeremiah did not echo the advice of Isaiah. On the contrary, he advised the Hebrews to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, and, when he should conquer the city and carry them away captive, to accept this event as the working out of a divine plan, to adjust themselves to their new situation, and to "seek the welfare of the land to which I have led you, and pray for it to Jehovah; for in its welfare is your welfare" (Jer. 29<sub>7</sub>). The whole chapter should be read, and chapter 24 as well. It is not

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

difficult to understand how Jeremiah's attitude would arouse violent opposition on the part of the "patriots," as well as of those who would feel that reliance upon the counsel of so great a prophet as Isaiah was the truest trust in Jehovah. It was difficult for the majority to understand that a divine message, applicable to a certain time and situation, might be flatly contradicted by an equally divine message, designed for a different situation and a different time. But divine revelation has always been of this progressive and, necessarily at times, contradictory character, and it is this kind of revelation that is to be found in the Bible. The deeper unity of spirit and aim transcends the superficial unities of time and place.

(2) Another difference between Jeremiah and his predecessors arose out of the great reformation under Josiah. This movement had established standards unknown in the earlier time. It had centralized worship in Jerusalem, while, in Isaiah's time, shrines where Jehovah might be worshiped were numerous and unchallenged. It had led to

## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

a special group of priests being isolated as the legal and official custodians of the sacred ritual, although in Isaiah's day each shrine had its priest or priestly group whose eminence corresponded to that of the shrine they served. And, finally, it had appealed to a book for its authorization and direction, whereas the prophets before Jeremiah made no such appeal, their authority being solely the significant, "Thus saith the LORD."

These differences involving, as they do, the impossibility of appealing to precedents, and the necessity of reliance upon originality and insight, do not exhaust the perplexities of Jeremiah's position. One of the most serious of these was inherent in the nature of the problem. It has already been indicated that many of the requirements found in the covenant (that is, the book of Deuteronomy) permitted an external and arbitrary enforcement, which might bring about conformity, but could go no further. This external aspect of the movement was popularly regarded as sufficient and satisfactory. The voluntary obedience to which

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

Deuteronomy, following Hosea, had applied the term "covenant," inevitably tended to become formal and mechanical. This tendency reacted on the popular conception of the covenant, transforming it into a sort of commercial transaction pitifully unlike the rich, spiritual response contemplated in the book of Deuteronomy.

The ambiguity here involved is far removed from anything the earlier prophets had to deal with. They could denounce the worship of foreign deities and the debased practices associated with such worship, or they could appeal from formality in worship to ethical practices in the daily life. And in these respects Jeremiah followed them. But the novel and difficult task which confronted Jeremiah was that of reaching down to the hearts of men in order to purify their motives. He must appeal from an obedience which performed to an obedience which aspired; from a Jehovah who commanded to a Jehovah who besought; from a covenant regarded as a contract to a covenant regarded as a bond of love.

## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

Jeremiah's recognition of the character of this task was met by the spiritual idealism which urged him to grapple with it. This throws an interesting light upon many passages in the book, especially of a denunciatory character, which are otherwise forbidding and obscure. He is here engaged in the most difficult and profound task that ever falls to the lot of men, namely, that of enlarging and deepening the conception of God.

Man's discovery of God, like his discovery of the world about him, has been gradual. It is always advancing, but never complete. Not to go beyond the bounds of the Bible itself, it is obvious that the primitive views of God held by the Hebrews, in the early days of the period of the Judges, are far below the level of the views of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah. No question is raised here of a change in God himself, but only of the gradual outreach of the mind of man toward the truth.

In man's thought of God the advance has been not only gradual but reluctant. In



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

spite of his inalienable conviction that God is greater than all man's thought, he has clung desperately to his own particular conceptions of him, as though present knowledge were final and complete, as though an old error were harmless if only it were held with vigor, and a new truth fatal if it involved a break with an old one. Even when it is granted that in the past such advances have been made, it is confidently denied that in the present any advance is probable. The recognition of this attitude as a fact of human experience is the best possible preparation for an understanding of Jeremiah's supreme work and its almost insuperable difficulties. With their new and nobler conceptions of God and of his desires for men, the prophets generally, and Jeremiah in particular, saw with special clearness the contrast between man's privilege and his practice. As a result, their words are predominantly words of rebuke, warning, or denunciation. But they speak in no arbitrary or petulant spirit. Their vision of God showed life in a new perspective, and in its

## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

light they were appalled at the emptiness and futility of conventional religion. Yet they are not pessimists. They can be terrible in their denunciations only because they are sure of a God who meant better things for his people, of One whose chief desire was that they should live in the full realization of his love and care, and of One who stood ready to welcome and forgive all who came to him in spirit and truth. The prophet could have adopted without hesitation what Paul was to say of himself at a later day, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." In this spirit Jeremiah labored with his people, pleaded with them, prayed for them, lived for them, and died for them.

With all these facts and factors in mind, one can almost anticipate the general character of the message Jeremiah would feel himself called to proclaim. In spite of the glorious outbursts of reform in the reign of Josiah, in spite of the revolutionary trans-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

formations which had been introduced into much of the social and religious life, he saw that the old sins persisted. The idea of the covenant was magnificent—if men had only responded to its whole appeal. But they had not. And the covenant itself, as contained in the book, and imposed by the priesthood at the central temple, had failed to arouse the spirit of men or nation to a response commensurate with Jeremiah's ideals. From this point of view, the splendid covenant, confirmed by a prophetic word, promulgated as a royal edict, and imposed without compromise, had proved a splendid failure. It is not without a certain awe that one realizes the boldness, even of a prophet, in thus turning his back, not only upon downright wickedness, but upon a goodness that was superficial and incomplete, and a divine covenant that had proved inadequate.

Jeremiah, however, was so sure of his ground that he expressed himself in the only way a Hebrew could express such an assured conviction: he carried it back

## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

to a "Thus saith the LORD." With this as his high commission he advanced to his task. Although the people had the book itself, Jeremiah charges them with ignorance of the truth (5<sub>4</sub>; 7<sub>28</sub>). In spite of the temple's exaltation to a sanctity sole and supreme, Jeremiah denounces those who put their trust in it (7<sub>4</sub>). Even those who call God "Father" (3<sub>4</sub>) are not spared.

It is not to be supposed that all the people held Jeremiah's views, or even that they knew them and had rejected them. The views that Jeremiah condemns had all been set forth as of divine ordination in the book which had been the immediate occasion for the great reform. Jeremiah was not calling men back to standards which they had knowingly forsaken. He was condemning the results of efforts the people had made to conform to divine standards as they understood them. They had listened eagerly to priest and prophet, but Jeremiah condemned priest, prophet, and people together (5<sub>30,31</sub>). The times were out of joint! Yet Jere-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

miah did not shrink from the Herculean task of setting them right.

He saw that the people lacked not only a will to do right, but even a knowledge of what the right should be. The covenant had failed to inform the mind and to purify the heart. Salvation from this condition could be found alone in that true knowledge of God himself which was more than a knowledge of his will. It must be a knowledge which was not only a possession but a possessor. A wisdom that fell short of this had no value for Jeremiah; and he has epitomized his own teaching, as well as that of the greater prophets, in words that, for dignity and lofty beauty, are but rarely matched, even in the biblical literature:

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom,  
Neither let the strong man boast of his  
strength,

Let not the rich man boast of his riches;  
But if one would boast, let him boast of  
this:



## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

That he hath understanding, and that he  
knoweth me,  
That I am Jehovah who doeth kindness,  
Justice and righteousness in the earth:  
For in these do I delight, saith Jehovah"  
(9<sup>23</sup>, 24).

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Like an iron pillar and a brazen wall (1<sub>18</sub>; 15<sub>20</sub>) Jeremiah stood against nations, kings, and his own people. As one reads along through his book, especially through the earlier chapters, the hard, forbidding character of his words becomes monotonous and oppressive. The picture is too dark, the denunciations and threats too severe. True, further study lightens this darkness to some extent, but one's first impression is undoubtedly discouraging. This impression is due quite as much to Baruch as to Jeremiah. Jeremiah's rebukes and warnings are no more severe than those of the other prophets, but Baruch has given us more of them. The other prophets had no Baruch.

The earlier part of the book, condensing the sermons and conversations of so many years into a few chapters, is largely taken up with rebukes of the people for their sins. A survey of these passages throws light not only on the sins them-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

selves but, by contrast, on Jeremiah's standards of righteousness.

(1) The worship of other gods than Jehovah, especially the gods of Canaan. It is impossible for us to-day to understand the attraction this worship had for the Hebrews, or how it must have seemed almost necessary to many of the people. Monotheism has so long been accepted among us. Consequently it is difficult to feel with Jeremiah that no form of polytheism makes any appeal. in his abhorrence of this practice. If we had Christian friends in the Far East who had adopted Mohammedanism or Buddhism, we might have a slight glimmer of sympathy with Jeremiah in this matter, but even in such a case it would be felt that such apostasy was exceptional and not seriously to be reckoned with. Perhaps if large numbers of orthodox Christians in our own churches should flock to some foreign religion, we might feel as Jeremiah felt.

It is characteristic of Jeremiah that (*a*) he emphasizes the ingratitude of the people toward Jehovah, and that (*b*) he contrasts this ingratitude with the loyalty of the other nations to their own gods, even though (*c*) from his own point of view the foreign gods are not gods. Make a list of passages from chaps. 2 to 6 illustrating these three points.

(2) The orthodox religion had become an

## THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

elaborate but an empty formality. A certain form and order, a certain amount of ritual, are inseparable from any religion. Love for one's fellow men must have outward expression of some kind, and so must one's love for God. Those who love God not only desire to give united expression to their reverence, gratitude, and love, but they realize that these feelings are deepened when they are worthily expressed by a devout assembly. Unfortunately, the forms and ceremonies tend quickly to become ends in themselves, and it is no longer asked whether they truly embody a sincere worship. The next step is to regard them as better evidences of religion than righteous living day by day; and finally their observance is felt to be even a substitute for a righteous life, and a release from the obligation to live such a life. This superficial formality stirred Jeremiah deeply, as it had stirred the great prophets before him. In chaps. 7 to 9 there are many passages which illustrate his condemnation of it. Make a list of these passages.

(3) The unethical character of the daily life. This is the other side of the empty formalism referred to in (2). Jeremiah is unsparing in his condemnation of those who fail to observe the moral law. In this too he joins the other great prophets. One of their most characteristic and most revolutionary contributions to the idea of

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

religion was that moral character is fundamental and essential, and that it must find expression in ethical conduct. Jeremiah's words on this subject are not as numerous as those on some others, but they are numerous enough and quite definite. Make a list of such passages from chaps. 7, 9, 22, 23.

It must not be overlooked that Jeremiah was not thinking of a small religious group within the nation. For him and his contemporaries the church (as we should call it) and the nation were synonymous. Religion was part of the life of the state, and a condemnation of the current religion was inevitably a condemnation of the nation's leaders. This relation does not exist in our own country, and yet it is generally said that we are a Christian nation. In the light of this situation, prepare a statement embodying the criticisms a Jeremiah might make of our national Christianity to-day.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEW COVENANT

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY—THE ONLY ENDURING COVENANT—JEREMIAH'S TEACHING CONFIRMED BY JESUS—STRIKING PARALLELS BETWEEN JESUS AND JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH was not a destructive critic. An Amos might be willing to confine himself to condemnation and rebuke, but not a Jeremiah. The more clearly he saw the depths to which, from his point of view, the people had sunk, the more he sought a way to lift them up. He was baffled by their obstinacy. His familiar saying about the ineradicable character of the Ethiopian's color and the leopard's spots, as illustrations of the persistence of the people's sinful spirit (Jer. 13<sub>23</sub>), shows that the subject had already engaged and perplexed him. This was the dark side of the story. But he was deeply convinced that there was—that there must be—a bright side. There must be some



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

way out. He himself might be baffled, but not Jehovah.

This conviction finds beautiful expression ~~in the simple story of the potter at his wheels~~ (18<sub>1.4</sub>). The sight was a familiar one to Jeremiah, but this time it glowed with a new significance. As on the day when the Watchful Tree became vital with a spiritual message, so, this other day, a similar awakening transfigured the work of the potter. While Jeremiah is not the only one who has found a figurative use for the potter's work, he has put upon it the stamp of his own originality. The potter's control of the clay is a fairly obvious aspect of the operation and, without going further, both Isaiah and Paul have seen and used this aspect as illustrating the divine sovereignty. For them man is as clay in the hands of the Divine Potter in the sense that man is helpless, and the Divine Potter supreme.

Jeremiah saw further than this. He saw that the potter was not always baffled when a particular lump of clay proved refractory. If, while the wheel turned, the clay showed

## THE NEW COVENANT

a quality unsuitable for the vessel which had been begun, the potter "made it into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (18<sub>4</sub>). The point is not so much that the potter had, or had not, control over the clay; that is obvious, and granted. Jeremiah was characteristically more profound. He regarded, not the power of the potter, but the fate of the clay. Modification might be necessary, but out of the same clay there came a vessel useful and worthy. Its first failure was neither final nor irretrievable. This was, for Jeremiah, a vision of hope for the people. Jehovah could still make of Israel something worth while, something worthy of the people, and worthy of himself.

Unique and highly characteristic of Jeremiah as this interpretation is, it has still further importance in marking a stage in Jeremiah's progress toward his crowning vision. The spiritual summit which he ultimately reached was "not attained by sudden flight." It was but the end of a long journey. He had been long upon the way to it. At first, almost in despair about his people,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

he regarded them as unable to do right. Yet even here, his reference to the Ethiopian and the leopard is only suggestive, not definitive. His idea is not that the people were innately, inherently bad. They had reached their low estate through the development of a habit that had brought them to badness. Their apparent incorrigibility was not really born in them, like the color and the spots. This was only a partial aspect of the case; and he passed on from here to a point where the thought of God's care and power opens the way toward the possibility of remaking the marred vessel into another, "as it seemed good to the potter to make it." Growing out of both these ideas there came the final vision which, for its far look into a future not yet reached, is unsurpassed. Even Jesus himself did no more than take up the same idea, make it his own, and then restate it in his own words.

The immediate background for Jeremiah's great message is found in the failure of the people to observe the covenant in the deeply spiritual way which alone was ade-

## THE NEW COVENANT

quate from his point of view. With a discernment far deeper than any who had preceded him, he went straight to the heart of the matter. He saw that the trouble was with men, not with laws. Legal enactments, in their lack of power to develop a spirit of obedience, leave room for an obedience that is purely formal and mechanical. Something must always be left to the spirit. It would be impossible to devise a system of laws that should cover every detail of daily life; and the effort made in Deuteronomy to inculcate a legal system that should awaken a motive and spirit was foredoomed to failure. No matter how definite nor how drastic the ordinances had been, they failed to command the elusive life of the spirit. The enduring beauty of "the former covenant" as set forth in the book of Deuteronomy, the searching appeals based on love and gratitude, faded quickly from the sight of a people who preferred to worship God by rote.

Jeremiah seems also to have realized that if the book were retained as the embodiment of God's will, there would be no further

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

place or need for prophets. But again his way out of the difficulty was as characteristic as it was unique. It is found, not by concentration of attention upon the book, nor by any impassioned defense of prophets and the prophetic line, but in the possession of the prophetic spirit by every individual. While this would make further prophets unnecessary, it would also make books unnecessary; that is, in so far as books could be regarded as a substitute for the Living Word. On one hand this might seem a return to an earlier view, but on the other hand it set a goal for the religious life which to this day is recognized as its true ideal; and one of the highest tributes to Jeremiah's profound religious insight is his discovery and assertion of this principle. There are no more searching words in the Old Testament:

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every



## THE NEW COVENANT

man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Jehovah'; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31<sub>33, 34</sub>).

Such words as these transcend the immediate impressions of the senses, and the deductions of logical intellect. They are spiritual intuitions in which the human soul comes face to face with eternal truth, "deep calleth unto deep." How long Jeremiah had pondered over the problem, how extensively he had discussed it with Baruch, how earnestly he had prayed over it, is, of course, quite impossible to tell. The fact that it is properly described as an intuition does not imply that it was unprepared. The brevity of his statement, as it now stands in his book, is misleading in its suggestion that it had no spiritual ancestry, or that it was a detached utterance of the Almighty in whose transmission Jeremiah acted as a mere automaton. On the contrary it must be recognized as having sprung naturally—that is, di-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

vinely—out of a personal character and a spiritual life in which alone such high thoughts can root and ripen; and in these words he is revealed as the supreme saint of the Old Testament.

The ideas here set forth have long been recognized as so true that it is rarely asked when they first appeared, or who first proclaimed them. But this is their historic background. Here, for the first time, true religion is clearly expressed as, (1) the concern of the individual far more intimately than the concern of the nation as such; (2) as depending ultimately on perfect harmony with the will of God; (3) as attainable, not by any outward conformity, but only in a spirit and a life. This is nothing less than the perfect incarnation of the Spirit of God in the very being of man. Divinely illuminated, man thus thinks God's thoughts. Kindled by the divine love, man's delight becomes the doing of the divine will. In these words, "the heart of man and the law of God are no longer regarded as external to each other." God's will is no longer conceived as

## THE NEW COVENANT

mediated by the written code, the priestly ritual, or even by the prophetic word. God is a God at hand, and not afar off. How or when this ideal is to be realized, Jeremiah does not say. "Enough that he saw it once; we shall see it by and by." In the meantime it becomes increasingly evident that the basis of all religious progress, indeed, of all human progress, is that increasing knowledge of God, which is, at the same time, a larger knowledge of truth.

Throughout his life Jesus fulfilled this "new covenant," and gave himself to the task of making it a reality in the lives of men. In his last hours with his disciples it was this new covenant that was in his mind, when, at the Last Supper, he said, "This is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22<sub>20</sub>). In the term "New Testament," Christianity has an enduring reminder of this supreme teaching of Jeremiah, for he was the first to draw the contrast between old and new in this respect. The translation, "covenant" in one case, and "testament" in the other, has obscured this to some extent; but this appears

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

in the translation only, for in the Greek the words are the same.

The old saying that history repeats itself is fulfilled in the way the fate of Deuteronomy has been repeated in that of the New Testament. On the basis of this literature, which sprang from a movement so supremely spiritual, subsequent generations of Christians drifted far from the inner, spiritual emphasis, and erected churches, creeds, doctrines, and all manner of external conformities, overlooking more and more the spiritual character of those who could conform and assent. The words of Jesus are spirit and life, not form and ceremony; and the familiar term, "New Testament" (better, New Covenant) should stand not only for the heritage bequeathed the world by Jeremiah, not only as a precious treasure from the lips of Jesus, but as an epitome of the ideal that will never be realized until it is seen and sought by every Christian.

A clue to the real greatness of Jeremiah might have been found in the fact that he and Elijah are the only prophets mentioned

## THE NEW COVENANT

by name, with whom Jesus was identified by his contemporaries (Matt. 16<sub>14</sub>). The association with Elijah is doubly significant in view of Jeremiah's widespread reputation for tears and timidity; for if ever there was a man of vigor, and even of violence, Elijah was that man, and he is probably the last one throughout the whole of the Old Testament who would be chosen to-day as a companion to Jeremiah.

But the traits in Jeremiah which give him the highest place, and the most enduring fame, are not those which he shares with Elijah. More nearly than any other Old Testament character, he embodies the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. He shows, in anticipation, the spirit of Jesus. Even in outward experience these two follow a strangely parallel path. Both came under popular condemnation for predicting the destruction of the temple; both aroused the hatred of the official priesthood; both were put to death by the very people they tried to help. The words "Led as a lamb to the slaughter" are used of both; for this phrase,



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

which occurs in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and is used later of Jesus, is used first by Jeremiah of himself (Jer. 11<sub>19</sub>). The parallel continues in spiritual things as well. Both taught with great clearness the forgiving love of God, and both proclaimed and exemplified the "new covenant" of spiritual and individual devotion to his will. Both gave to the world revelations of God, and of man's ways of access to him, that were, indeed, new at the time, but were so true, that they have been taken up into the great stream of religious thought and practice ever since.

The book of Jeremiah contains a great mass of material relating to the life and work of the prophet; but much of this material is of a fragmentary character, and much of it is in great disorder. This has made it difficult to form a convincing conception of the man himself. In addition to this, the story itself is depressing in its tragic progress. Even its most cheerful part, the time of Jeremiah's early life, is at first, distant and obscure. Then, in the years following

## THE NEW COVENANT

the death of Josiah, the clouds become darker and darker, and the nation finally goes out in gloom. Even in Jeremiah himself nothing very winsome appears on first acquaintance, and he seems quite eclipsed by his greatest predecessor, Isaiah. In recent years, however, it is becoming clearer that, when his story has been sufficiently mastered, he was one who, in purity of heart, humility, and courage, stands alone in the Old Testament. There were, of course, devout men before his day, as there have been after, but in him the soul of man made a definite advance in its approach to God and its understanding of the divine will. In the great company of those who "by divers portions and in divers manners" prepared the way for Jesus, no voice rang truer, no hand wrought surer, no heart beat purer, than the voice, hand, and heart of Jeremiah.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

What other great characters in history are there who show similarities to Jeremiah? in his personality? his experiences? his aims? his success or failure?

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

What really constitutes success or failure in such cases? How can a man's contribution to the progress of the world's life and thought be recognized? or measured? Is there any relation between the scope of a man's message and the degree to which its truth is recognized by his contemporaries? or between a man's service to his people and his people's recognition of that service?

What seems to be the motive power that sustains great men in such circumstances? Where do they find sufficient satisfaction or encouragement to continue at their task? or do they sometimes give it up? Whence comes the incentive to take up any such task in the first place? Has Jeremiah a message for the world, or only for Jews and Christians?

Write a sketch of not less than a thousand words indicating his place and importance in human history.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

THE RELEASE OF THE INDIVIDUAL—THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF RELIGION—THE PRAYER OF PERSONAL FREEDOM—JEREMIAH'S THOUGHT OF GOD—THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE—CONCERNING THE FUTURE

ANY attempt to set forth Jeremiah's religious teaching is attended with a curious perplexity. His book is so rich in personal material that the picture of the prophet himself is strikingly clear. This is true not only of his outward experiences but equally of his inner life and thought. For this reason his "teachings," as they are called, are so much a part of himself that it is difficult, even for purposes of discussion, to distinguish between the man and his message. It is, of course, true that the personality and experiences of every great teacher are essential factors in determining the form and content of his teaching, but in the case of Jeremiah

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

this is true in such a high degree that a statement of the teaching becomes a kind of spiritual biography.

This rather perplexing difficulty, however, is not wholly a disadvantage. It necessitates a constant recognition of the important fact that divine truth is a seed which must be planted in the field of human personality and experience in order to have its normal growth and to bear its proper fruit; and Jeremiah's "teachings" become vital and significant in the degree to which they are recognized as aspects of his own personal religious faith. It is in this light that they should be approached, and it is in this way that they will here be considered. The familiarity of some of these teachings to-day is convincing evidence of the profound influence of Jeremiah upon religious thought since his time.

It should not be supposed that his religious ideas were all announced by him in a formal way, as though they constituted a system of theological teaching. If asked what his "teachings" were, he would proba-



## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

bly have directed the inquirer to the exhortations and rebukes he addressed to his people (36<sub>2</sub>), and it is true that in these addresses some of his religious ideas necessarily appear. These addresses, however, are obviously directed toward particular situations and are designed to lead to definite and immediate results. It was these special purposes that would be paramount in Jeremiah's thought at the time. He was not concerned to elaborate all those underlying principles which are now recognized as fundamental in all that he said, and it is doubtful whether he would recognize either their novelty in comparison with the past, or their possible influence upon the distant future. He was primarily concerned with a mission to his own people, and it probably never occurred to him that his words would be discussed thousands of years after he was dead and gone. Yet it is these underlying principles that give Jeremiah his exalted place among the prophets, and that constitute the richest bequest of his inspiration.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

### THE RELEASE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Throughout the East from time immemorial the individual has been comparatively insignificant. The family, the tribe, or the nation, constitutes a social unit whose welfare and importance dominate social thought. Like a modern corporation, this social unit has an existence of indefinite duration. At any rate, its life outlasts the life of any individual member, and in the preservation and prosperity of this corporate life the individual as such holds a quite subordinate place. This is true in some degree down to the present day, and it was even more universally true in ancient times.

The degree to which this idea permeated the Old Testament is reflected in the unquestioning way many Bible readers to-day think of the Hebrew nation as a compact and unchanging unit, moving first from Egypt to Canaan, then to Babylon, and then throughout the world, an immortal fugitive, a veritable Wandering Jew. Such readers make no allowance for the passing of generations. The nation is thought of, and spoken

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

of, as though it always comprised the very same individuals who rejoiced under David, sinned under later kings, and at a still later time were dispersed over the world. No provision is made for individuals within the nation who, in a time of national wickedness or disaster, still held fast their integrity and remained faithful to Jehovah. The idea that "the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children" is held in such a mechanical and rigid fashion (in spite of the fact that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel explicitly deny it) that no place is left for any fathers, in earlier or later generations, whose upright lives might release them, and at least some of their descendants, from such a doom.

The simplicity of the "sins-of-the-fathers" theory makes it particularly attractive to unreflective minds; and, as a matter of fact, the idea is valid up to a certain point.<sup>1</sup> But

---

<sup>1</sup>This theory has no relation to the modern doctrine of heredity. As presented in the Bible it has to do with the direct and arbitrary operation of divine power prompted by the divine jealousy or generosity (Deut. 5. 9, 10), and not at all with an impartial law of cause and effect operating biologically.

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

there are vast stretches of life and experience for which such easy solutions are utterly inadequate. There are individual rights and responsibilities which are as vital and as real as those of the family or tribe, and which the latter can never satisfy. The day was bound to come when some farseeing mind, in spite of an inheritance which from most ancient times had held the contrary, would rise to the discovery that if man is dependent, he is also independent, and that the preservation of individuality is as normal and necessary as the preservation of the tribe. This discovery was made by Jeremiah, and it was he who first practically disengaged the individual from the social group.

It was but natural that he should develop it chiefly in the field of religion. He was not a modern sociologist discussing society and the individual, and he had no abstract theoretical interests. Out of his own spiritual necessities he was forced to advance to new conceptions of religion, and fundamental among these was this conviction that a man's religious affairs could not all be managed on

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

a wholesale basis. Some things remained which none but the man himself could attend to. This was necessary for the man's own sake. Jeremiah does not indicate it to be a man's *duty* to say his own prayers, or to plead personally for himself or his people; it is, rather, a high and emancipating *privilege*. Combining this, as he did, with a clear conception of individual responsibility (31<sub>29,30</sub>), he presents the elements necessary for a well-rounded doctrine of religion in its individual expression.

### THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF RELIGION

The position just noted involves a conception of religion differing from that commonly held down to Jeremiah's time. Previously, religion was felt to concern itself almost exclusively with material affairs. Divine approval was sought in order to insure victory in war, fruitfulness of field and vineyard, success in trade, good health, and, above all, a male posterity (cf. Gen. 16; 17; and 1 Sam. 1). The place these held in the welfare of the social group was easily



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

and generally recognized, and men would be slow to look beyond them for objects of divine concern. Only as men became aware of the more spiritual elements in their nature would it dawn upon them that Deity cared for these as deeply as for victorious armies, fertile fields, and large families. This view was first propounded by men whose own natures were so rich and deep that they needed larger spiritual satisfactions than those afforded by formal ceremonies and material comforts. Inspired by their own God-given hunger and thirst for a richer righteousness than the current religion supplied, they moved out into new discoveries of the spiritual relations which a man may hold with his Maker.

Among these discoverers Jeremiah holds a unique eminence. His position is not simply that an individual may come to God and ask for what he wants, as an Abraham or a Hannah might ask for a child; it is not simply that an individual may offer his sacrifice or his prayer to God without priestly aid; it is, rather, that religion itself is primarily an



## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

affair of the spirit. For him it has become a matter of aim, of motive, and of aspiration. Sacrifices and prayers are not ends in themselves; they are the fruits, not the roots, of personal religion. One idea of religion is that it is an affair of ritual, that is, of certain things to be done or said. The prophetic idea is that it is an affair of the inner spirit, and of the life which that spirit produces. The two ideas do not necessarily exclude each other, but it is obvious that a most assiduous performance of a ritual is no sure defense against an evil purpose or a selfish aim.

Among the words of Jeremiah there are three of special significance in this connection. The first one is in 4<sup>1.4</sup>, especially verses 3 and 4 (cf. *C.B.*). This brief word is not only highly characteristic of Jeremiah, but it stands out as one of the monuments of the whole prophetic teaching of the Old Testament. It is closely echoed in New Testament times by Paul in such words as 2 Cor. 5<sup>17</sup> and Gal. 6<sup>15</sup>. The breaking up of fallow ground means starting out in new direc-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

tions or, as Paul would say, becoming a new creature. The spiritual circumcision means accomplishing in the spiritual realm by a spiritual act what the ritual act was expected to accomplish but could not because it was purely external and mechanical.

The second word is found in the first part of the so-called temple discourse, 7<sub>3-11</sub> (cf. *C.B.*). Here the contrast is drawn between the outward symbols of religion, in this case especially the temple, and the perverted spirit which cares nothing for the temple's God, or for the life which would reflect God's character. The third word (31<sub>31-34</sub>), has already been sufficiently considered above, in chap. 7.

### THE PRAYER OF PERSONAL FREEDOM

It is too easily taken for granted that the prayers of the Old Testament all represent the same degree of religious insight and aspiration, yet such an impression quickly disappears as soon as they are carefully examined. There are prayers for victory and for vengeance, for health and for harvests, for chil-

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

dren, for long life, and for all the innumerable objects of human desire. There are ritual prayers of praise and worship, of adoration, of penitence, and of thanksgiving. Yet none of these, exalted as some of them are, is of the kind that grew out of the experience of Jeremiah, prayers that have ever since been recognized as of a deeper, more personal spirit than any of the other kinds could be. Jeremiah's contribution to the subject of prayer, however, must be found in the character of his own prayers. He has no theoretical statements to make on the subject. He did not discuss prayer; he prayed; and it is out of the prayers themselves that there spring that new spirit and attitude which have set new standards for all subsequent praying.

It may well have been that he was led to his strangely intimate approach to God by the feeling of a breach between himself and his people, and of a similar breach between the people and Jehovah. This left him in a situation of oppressive spiritual isolation; and, in a kind

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

of desperate spiritual venture, he threw himself on God. He prayed, not as though he, a worm of the dust, were asking favors of an omnipotent Creator of the universe; he prayed, not as though it were his duty as an insignificant servant to sound the praises of an unapproachable Master; he prayed almost, if one might say it, as man to man. He did not pray for gifts which might be bestowed upon him for pleasant uses, but in his prayers he held up to God his doubts and fears, his struggles and disappointments, that the light of truth might be shed abroad in his heart and that his mind might have peace. He did not so much talk *to* God as *with* God. His prayers were more like conversations, inquiries, debates, than like the words of a suppliant at a heavenly throne.

In this exercise of his right of immediate access to the Father he was developing that release of the individual to which reference has already been made. On the one hand he had realized the freedom of the individual to approach God on his own account, quite apart from his connection with family, tribe,

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

or nation. On the other hand he had realized that it was unnecessary for man to abase himself to such insignificance that he was practically reduced to zero in the divine presence. In a word, for Jeremiah, prayer had become a communion where "spirit with spirit may meet."

If comparisons may be made at all as between one kind of prayer and another, the higher type would be the kind exemplified in those who represent the more spiritual type of religious life. And the kind of prayers that Jeremiah prayed must be regarded as examples and standards of prayer, as it springs from the hearts and lives of those who live closest to God. Such prayers are not for all. They are proper and possible only for those who can live as greatly and as devotedly as the great prophets, apostles, and saints of all time. But as those lives are incentives and standards for others who seek to follow along the same path of divine fellowship, though at a distance, so these prayers of Jeremiah beckon the believer to a communion with God which is at once the



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

glory, the power, and the reward of the religious life.

### JEREMIAH'S THOUGHT OF GOD

Back of Jeremiah's thought of the individual, of the spiritual nature of religion, and of prayer, lies his thought of God. This is at once central and fundamental. Out of this sprang that freedom and confidence characteristic of his whole career, and without it the advance steps in his religious thought would never have been made. At first he doubtless accepted the belief in God which formed part of his Hebrew heritage and which was taught him in his youth. Even this belief had grown gradually from generation to generation as, in the person of one great teacher after another, the spirit of man itself became more and more responsive to the spirit of God. Very crude ideas of Deity had satisfied the Hebrews in earlier times, and all through the nation's history the mass of the people lagged behind the advancing thought of their leaders. Indeed, the leaders themselves shared, as well as



## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

guided, the gradual progress toward the fuller revelation. Greatly as Moses, for instance, may have surpassed the common thought of his own time, even he was not in a position to share those insights into the divine nature attained by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and later still by Jesus. In the great field of man's discovery of God, each has his own work, each enters into the labors of those who precede him, and each in his own way makes his contribution to the ultimate harvest.

This is not the place to discuss the conception of God that had been reached by the time Jeremiah appeared. Much had already been done, and under the teaching of the prophets of the eighth century B. C. God was being recognized more and more as one who not only was deeply attached to his people, but as one whose power and purposes were too far-reaching to be confined to the Hebrew nation alone. It was Jeremiah's privilege to pursue a path leading to a level even higher than this, and to reach a kind of continental divide that, naturally,

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

involved a relinquishment of some ideas that had been accepted in the past, but which opened immeasurable vistas before the eyes of those who were ready for the new vision.

The situation can be most conveniently epitomized by saying that Jeremiah stands at the point of transition from the conception of Jehovah to that of God (cf. p. 17, note). This distinction is no idle quibble over theological terms. The two words stand for ideas as different from each other as the ideas of nation and world, or of world and universe. The term "Jehovah" represents the idea of deity held by the Hebrews in the days when they supposed each nation, including their own, to have its own god or gods. During this period they thought of their own national deity under the name Jehovah. They thought but little, or not at all, of international affairs, and had no occasion to consider any relation their own deity might hold to people not "his own." Indeed, the familiar expression, "Jehovah, the God of Israel," is a direct reflection of this early exclusive idea.

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

In the course of the century preceding Jeremiah the Hebrews had been brought face to face with other nations and with other (supposed) deities, in a way that inevitably raised new and disturbing questions in the minds of religious thinkers. The great prophets of this time were the first to react in a constructive way, and they moved out toward a conception of Jehovah for which, in the very nature of the case, the term "Jehovah" was too narrow. These prophets, however, were only feeling their way. They saw but dimly as yet, and it remained for Jeremiah to advance to a conception of Jehovah (the old term inevitably persisted, even after its original significance had been quite outgrown) which knew him as supreme and sole, not in a nation only, but in the world. For this conception the later term "God" is necessary.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The Hebrew word translated "god" (or "God") is, of course, not later than the sacred name "JHVH" ("Jehovah"). The point made here is simply that *to the modern reader* the word "God" is inseparably associated with ideas both later and larger than those which belong properly under the word "Jehovah."

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

The modern reader has inherited such a long history of monotheistic thought, and is so accustomed to think of the world as a universe, that he instinctively connects the term "God" with these universal ideas. He does not always stop to consider that many great souls had long been "toiling upward through the night" before that summit was reached from which men caught the first glimpse of a universal sovereignty. It is this summit which Jeremiah seems to have been the first to gain. Even he did not take in the whole vast significance of his attainment. He did not realize that he actually stood upon the summit of a great divide. But it is clear now that although it never occurred to him to use any word but "Jehovah" when he thought of Deity, the real God whom he had found could no longer be adequately designated by the ancient Hebrew term. It was Jeremiah who hailed the dawn of a true monotheism. Jeremiah's thought of God contained, of course, other elements than this, but of them all this is the most original and the most important.

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

### THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE

With the deepening thought of God, there went necessarily a deepening conception of sin. If Jeremiah believed true religion to be a matter of the spirit, he could not help regarding sin as an offense against God in the field of spirit and character. One enters an entirely new world of religious realities when he begins to notice the frequency of Jeremiah's references to the way Jehovah tries hearts and minds, and compares these with the absence of such expressions in the words of the prophets who went before him. Later Christian teaching has placed such strong emphasis upon this aspect of sin and righteousness that it takes a real effort of the imagination to go back to a time when men did not take for granted that sin was a matter of thought and will. Yet there was such a time, and it continued at least down to the days of Jeremiah.

He was breaking new ground when he said, "O Jerusalem wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy thoughts of iniquity dwell



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

within thee?" (4<sub>14</sub>), and, "The heart is deceitful above all things" (17<sub>9</sub>), and again, "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly" (3<sub>10</sub>). This last passage is particularly striking in its refusal to accept the act at its face value. The people were not neglecting the formal worship of Jehovah, but they had not come to the point of realizing that the spirit in which the worship was performed was more important than the act of worship itself (cf. 6<sub>20</sub>; 7<sub>8,11</sub>). It is characteristic of all the prophets, including Jeremiah, that they do not attempt to argue such subjects, or to set forth in a systematic way their new ideas of religion and the consequent error of the popular view. Seeing the truth as clearly as they did, they bluntly denounce as sin all that conflicts with the truth they saw.

Jeremiah's view of sin was original in at least three aspects. In the first place he attributed it to the "stubbornness of an evil heart." This did not mean an emotional coldness but a mental hardness. The expression is more drastic than appears at first,

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

owing to the modern figurative use of the word "heart" (cf. above pp. 34f.). What Jeremiah is talking about is the refusal of the people to think new thoughts, their opposition to new ideas, their rejection of new light. He was condemning them for the sin of the closed mind. This carried the subject into a field which Jeremiah was the first to explore, and which even at the present day is shunned by many otherwise devout souls. Mental inertia is so comfortable that it has been erected into an article of faith, and many are the danger signals sent out to warn the unwary believer against new ideas. Jeremiah would have had scant sympathy for such defenders of ancient shibboleths. He would have classed them with those who cry, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (6<sub>14</sub>). For him this was sin, and he would probably still regard it as such.

In the second place he announced the great principle that sin tends to strengthen itself into a habit which later on can hardly be broken. This is the meaning of the famous verse, 13<sub>23</sub>. The habit has been de-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

veloped until it has become second nature. The psychological insight here manifested is only another one of those amazing flashes of genius that are constantly surprising the student of Jeremiah. He was no more a systematic psychologist than he was a sociologist. His interest was wholly religious. But, like a few other great men who have arisen all too rarely, he makes a casual gesture that implies a background which it takes the world at large a thousand years to discover. This principle, however, is now generally recognized, and its modern recognition has but confirmed the profound insight into the meaning of sin reached by this most original prophet of a distant day.

3 In the third place he recognized the necessity of individual repentance. It is not only certain groups or classes of the people who have sinned, but the whole community; and each and all must turn from their evil way. The sins he condemns are general, but they are the acts of individuals. It is the individual merchant, judge, priest, rich man or poor man, who must repent. This is the only

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

way of correcting a condition which Jeremiah clearly recognizes to be an expression of an inner spirit. In fact, his whole thought of sin is the logical complement of his view of the personal, spiritual relation between God and man.

### CONCERNING THE FUTURE

No thoughtful man, deeply concerned for the welfare of his people, can fail to refer at times to what he regards as the future hope or destiny of his people. The prophets were such men; and from time to time they too looked inquiringly into the future and spoke of possibilities yet to be realized. To regard them, however, as men *chiefly* concerned with persons and events so distant that the prophets themselves, and many generations following them, must pass away before those persons arose or those events transpired, is a view quite unsupported by the prophetic books.

This widespread but erroneous view has been strengthened by the desire to find in the Hebrew prophets, first, predictions point-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

ing to Jesus, and second, some indication of the future that yet awaits the race and the world.<sup>1</sup> This desire, honest and reverent as it is, always tends to divert attention from the subjects which the prophets were most eager to proclaim. They gave themselves to the needs of their own generation, and referred to the future only as it offered a warning or a hope to those whom they addressed.

Properly to appreciate these occasional sayings they should be approached from their own standpoint, whence all they refer to is regarded as still future, whether that future be near or far. Looking back upon them from a vantage point two or three thousand years later than the time they were uttered, it is almost impossible not to see them in a distorted perspective, and not to attribute to them meanings now familiar but

---

<sup>1</sup>It is a question how long a verb in the future tense is to be regarded as having validity. If one is to pin his faith to this grammatical form and hold that the word has authority *until it be fulfilled*, his faith defeats itself. For no matter when a fulfillment might occur, the future form of the verb remains; and if it be regarded as a "word of the Lord that shall stand forever," it can never be fulfilled, because it can refer only to something always future.



## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

then unknown. This distortion can be corrected only by careful study and the exercise of a sympathetic imagination.

Jeremiah's conception of the future in store for his own people (not for the world, nor for humanity) is indicated in a few passages not always clear enough for a definite picture. It has been the custom to speak of such prophecies as "Messianic," but this term covers such a wide variety of ideas, and is applied indiscriminately to ideas appearing in such different periods, that its use tends to confuse rather than to clarify. Jeremiah's outlook on the future may be summarized under three aspects:

1. He is sure that Jehovah has a plan for his people that will lead to blessing and happiness, at least for some of them. He does not definitely adopt Isaiah's thought of a "remnant" of the people, a remnant which will survive the purification of the nation and enjoy a blessed future. Yet he does not expect the whole nation to reach this happy goal. Those who were taken captive in B. C. 597 were for Jeremiah, as well as for

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

Ezekiel, the ones through whom and for whom the restoration would be consummated. These would be brought back, and in them God's purpose of love would be fulfilled. Sometime, somewhere, that fulfillment was assured.

2. His thought of a blessed future includes the idea of Palestine as the place where it would ~~be~~ realized. Christian thought has so long accepted the idea of heaven, and another world, that a serious incongruity is felt between this conception of a heaven on earth and other ideas of Jeremiah's which are so obviously and deeply spiritual. Yet not only Jeremiah, but practically all the religious teachers of the Old Testament were unaware of any incongruity. They believed sincerely that the world which God had made was "very good" (Gen. 1), and it never occurred to them that there could be a better place for the fulfillment of his purposes of good for his people. All the pictures they draw of the blessed future are drawn in terms of the life men are now living; and in holding this view, Jere-

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

miah simply stood alongside his fellow prophets.

3. Jeremiah's idea of the future, local and temporal though it be, is deeply spiritual. This is clearly indicated in such passages as 24<sub>7</sub> and 29<sub>11,14</sub>. This spirituality is not incompatible with the kind of national future Jeremiah anticipated. He has no fear of obstacles in the world of nature. It is only by sinful hearts that the blessed future is delayed. But in the days to come Jehovah himself will forgive their sins (31<sub>34</sub>), and give to his people hearts of wisdom that alone make true righteousness possible. Jeremiah says but little, compared with some of the other prophets, of the joys of that future time. For him the supreme thing, which includes and insures all other blessing, is true knowledge of God and spontaneous obedience to his will.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

The working out of a systematic arrangement of Jeremiah's teachings is no easy task, yet his power and originality are hardly to be appreci-

## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

ated until one acquaints himself at first hand with the material. If this cannot be done by original investigation, one can at least verify some of the work already done by others. For instance, material for Jeremiah's thought of God would be found by noting what Jeremiah represents Jehovah as condemning in the people, and what, on the other hand, Jehovah commands and desires. In the case of Jeremiah's advance to a doctrine of monotheism, one should consider his denial of the existence of other gods, as in 2<sub>11</sub>; 5<sub>7</sub>; 8<sub>19</sub>; 14<sub>22</sub>; 16<sub>20</sub>; and his thought of Jehovah as God of all nations, as in 16<sub>19</sub>; 32<sub>27</sub>; and the whole position represented in chaps 25 and 46 to 49. In connection with all these passages one should consult the best commentaries, in order at least to stir his powers of attention, whether he finds the commentaries convincing or not.

As soon as this kind of study is undertaken one quickly discovers perplexities in interpretation which casual, homiletical, or purely devotional reading would never observe. He discovers why questions must be asked regarding date and authorship of particular sayings, and why the integrity of some passages is not above reproach. He begins to see why literary and historical study of such great documents as the book of Jeremiah is an essential preliminary to the understanding of a prophet and his work. Even when entirely

## JEREMIAH AND HIS RELIGION

dependent upon English translations an earnest student can introduce himself to the meaning and the importance of this kind of work; and when he has once traveled that far he finds the Bible to be a living book in a degree never dreamed before.

In the light of these suggestions, make a study of chaps. 27 to 29, and write out a statement of results and conclusions. Let the items considered in the statement be regarded as a fair test of the student's grasp of what is involved in such a study, the aspects of the subject that should be considered, and the kind of results to be sought.

In studying the book of Jeremiah for "practical" purposes, two points should be borne in mind:

1. It is somewhat misleading to regard Jeremiah as an example for present-day Christians. Few of these have any conception of what religion meant to such a man. The innumerable activities that make up so much of modern church life permit too much that is purely formal and perfunctory. Religion in such a country as the United States, if observed in the conventional way, involves practically no sacrifice, struggle, opposition, or misunderstanding. It is respectable and familiar, a matter of convenience rather than conviction. Nothing could be farther from the consuming earnestness of a Jeremiah. He had to live and teach in the face of the inertia and opposition of those who neither desired nor un-



## A PROPHET OF THE SPIRIT

derstood his kind of religion; but for him there could be no other aim nor call. This intense and utter devotion to God's work is characteristic of all the prophets, and should warn the casual Christian that prophetic power is not compatible with the everyday life most Christians have to live.

2. In agreement with this is the fact that the fundamental teachings of Jeremiah presented in this chapter are not primarily material for use in evangelistic meetings as the term is commonly used. Such meetings are designed to lead sinners to repentance, and consequently deal with beginners in the religious life. These teachings of Jeremiah come from one who had long traveled that path, and they assume a certain religious maturity. They lie far beyond the frontiers of conversion, and relate to central citadels of faith. It is true that these teachings underlie the work of all evangelists, as it is true that Jeremiah called upon his people to repent; but these inspired contributions to the religious thought of the ages need to be so mastered and assimilated that they become, for the preacher or teacher, what they were for Jeremiah, namely, the inspiration, rather than the immediate material, for all special applications and specific work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The literature of Jeremiah is not extensive, but the following works may be consulted with advantage. With the exception of the Bible Dictionary they are inexpensive, and have been selected for the use of those who desire an adequate but not too technical approach to a difficult book:

**DRIVER:** The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. (Hodder and Stoughton.) A revised translation with introductions and short explanations.

**DAVIDSON:** Article "Jeremiah" in Vol. ii of Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings. (Scribners.)

**CHEYNE:** Jeremiah, His Life and Times. (Revell.) In Men of the Bible series.

**PEAKE:** Jeremiah, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press.) In New Century Bible series. A useful and generally excellent commentary.

**MOULTON:** Jeremiah. (Macmillan.) In Modern Reader's Bible series. Especially valuable for its introduction and its suggestion of the literary character of the book.

## CHRONOLOGY

**B. C.**

**639**

**626 The Call of  
Jeremiah**

**621 The Book and the  
Reformation**

**608**

**597 The first  
Captivity**

**586 The second  
Captivity**

**Josiah  
31 years**

**Jehoahaz  
3 months**

**Jehoiakim  
11 years**

**Jehoiachin  
3 months**

**Zedekiah  
11 years**

**Gedaliah  
a few months**

**Jeremiah  
60 years**

## INDEX OF SUBJECTS

- Abiathar, 32  
 Anathoth, 32  
 Armageddon, 51  
  
 Baruch, writes the book, 18;  
     as biographer, 18, 31, 90;  
     of Jeremiah's party, 58  
 Bible, later than its books,  
     13; a sacred book, 34  
 Book found in the temple,  
     *see* Deuteronomy  
  
 Captivity, the first, 59; the  
     second, 61; Jeremiah's  
     attitude toward, 114  
 Carchemish, battle of, 52  
  
 Deuteronomy discovered, 67;  
     result of reform move-  
     ments, 70f.; twofold con-  
     tent, 78, 116f.; date and  
     authorship, 81  
  
 Eli, 32  
 Elijah, 137  
 Exile, *see* Captivity  
 Ezekiel, 21, 58, 59, 60  
  
 False prophets, 56  
  
 God, Jeremiah's thought of,  
     154  
  
 Heart, Bible meaning of,  
     38, 44  
 History, extant in Jeremiah's  
     day, 34; interpreted reli-  
     giously, 33  
 Huldah the prophetess, 68  
  
 Individual religion, 148  
 Isaiah, 21, 55, 114  
  
 Jehoahaz, 51  
 Jehoiachin, 58  
 Jehoiakim, 58  
 Jehovah, in Revised Version,  
     17 *note*  
 Jeremiah, book of, origin, 13;  
     not a unit, 22; combines  
     narrative and discourse,  
     23; written long after  
     Jeremiah's call, 99  
 Jeremiah the prophet, birth-  
     place and education,  
     32f.; character, 36ff.,  
     96ff.; courage, 40f.; no  
     weeper, 41; in danger,  
     62, 80; attitude toward  
     the reform, 79f.; call,  
     95; compared with his  
     predecessors, 113f.; his  
     difficult task, 118; fore-  
     runner of Jesus, 138

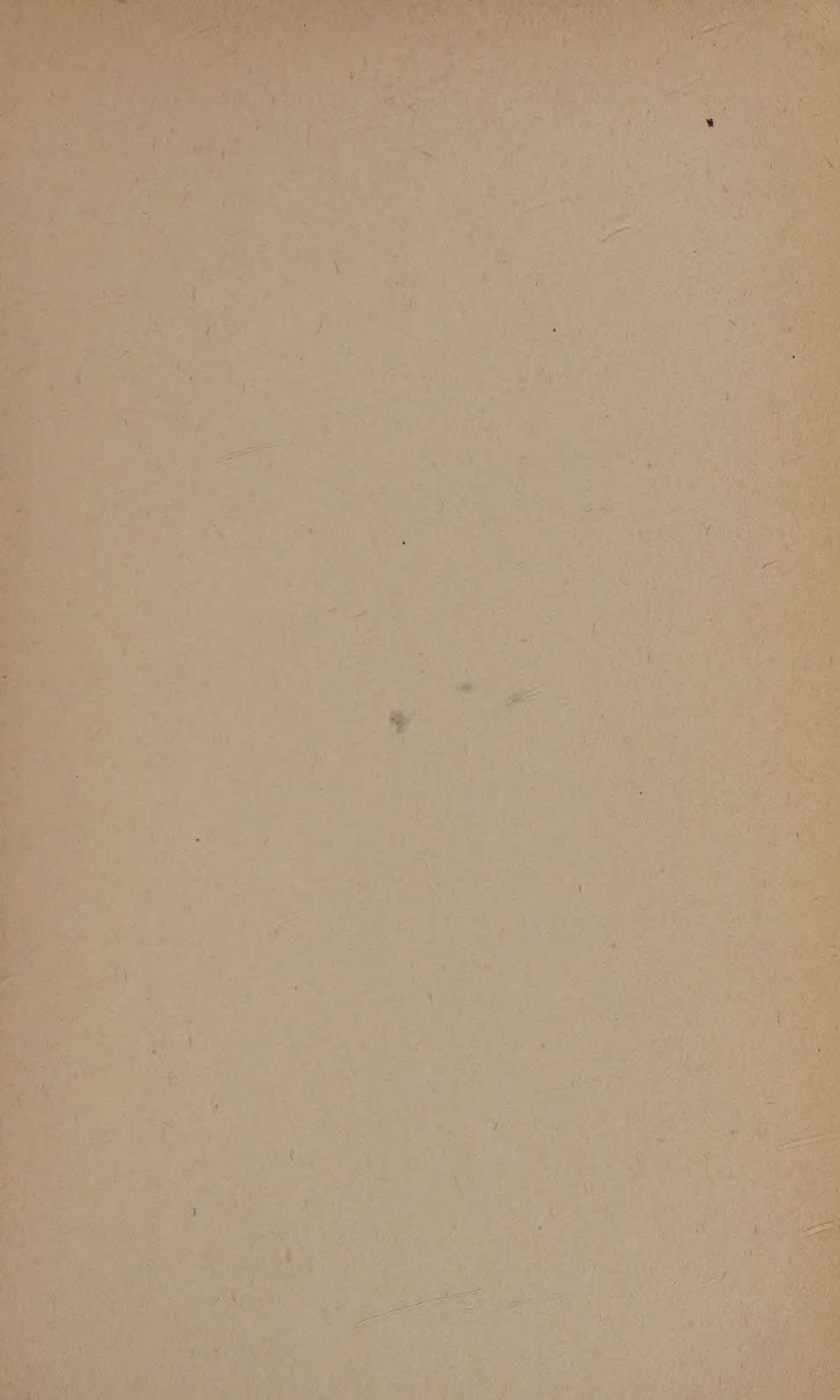
## INDEX OF SUBJECTS

- Jerusalem, not inviolable, 55,  
113; center for sacrifice,  
73, 115
- Jesus, fulfills the new cove-  
nant, 136; repeats ex-  
periences and teachings  
of Jeremiah, 138
- Josiah, reign of, 49; his re-  
form, 66ff.
- Judah, the state, small, 47;  
controlled by neighbor-  
ing empires, 48
- LORD, in King James Ver-  
sion, 17 *note*
- Messianic prophecies, 165
- Nebuchadnezzar, 53, 58, 61
- Northern kingdom, fall of,  
33
- Parties in Judah, 53ff.
- Politics, part of religion, 33,  
47
- Potter and clay, 129
- Prayer, deepened by Jere-  
miah, 107
- Priesthood, increases in im-  
portance, 74
- Prophet, a speaker, 19; his  
supreme work, 20; psy-  
chology of, 88; called, 92;  
not a pessimist, 120; cf.  
False prophets
- Reformation, called "Deu-  
teronomic," 69; origin  
obscure, 69; motive and  
method, 72; externally  
successful, 77
- Religion, associated with  
politics, 33, 47; true re-  
ligion epitomized, 135
- Revelation, described idio-  
matically, 16; progres-  
sive and contradictory,  
115; gradual, 118; re-  
luctantly received, 118
- Sacrifice, centralized at Jeru-  
salem, 73
- Saul, King of Israel, 33
- Sin, Jeremiah's thought of,  
145
- Uriah, companion of Jere-  
miah, 58, 62
- Will of God, referred to idio-  
matically, 16f.; *vs.* a  
book, 77
- Word of the LORD, an idio-  
matic expression, 14-17;  
received through prophet  
or book, 76; transcends  
books, 132f.
- Zedekiah, 61











224.2  
L84

Longacre, Lindsay B.

A Prophet of the Spirit

S27416

224.2  
L84

*Bethel Theological*  
**SEMINARY**  
**LIBRARY**  
*New Brighton, Minn. - 55112*

S27416



